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# **JoMaCC**

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Valentina Ciciliot  
Giovanni Vian

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# JoMaCC

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# **Christian Churches Between the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries**

edited by

Claus Arnold, Valentina Ciciliot, Giovanni Vian





## Editorial

Claus Arnold, Valentina Ciciliot, Giovanni Vian

The articles in this issue collectively help to illuminate phenomena and experiences of the Christian Churches between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, focusing on important themes such as modernism and anti-modernism, the growing prominence of women, the socio-cultural and political relevance of Christianity in the United States of America, and the dramatic intertwining of war, peace, and ecumenism in the involvement of the Churches in the current Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

Tomáš Petráček's article offers an up-to-date picture of the modernist crisis in Central Eastern Europe with a focus on the Catholic Church in the Czech lands. His presentation is based on a historiographical review of the main studies on modernism and anti-modernism in that area, which have developed significantly over the last thirty years, following research dynamics that had generally already taken hold in the preceding decades (as is well known, particularly but not exclusively in the French, Italian, German and English contexts) and have never stopped since. Petráček's essay also presents the most characteristic elements of Czech modernism, contextualising them in the historical development of this Church and outlining possible future lines of research. In fact, the issue of "modernism" has been treated for the decades after the crisis of the early 20th century mainly under the label of neo-modernism. Especially the issue of anti-modernism now appears to scholars of the history of Christianity as a long-term problem, which clearly still had a significant impact in the Catholic Church in the mid-twentieth century (Even after Vatican II it was revived, albeit in a considerably changed ecclesial and historical context). This was also one of the outcomes

of the recent Italian-French-German workshop held at Villa Vigoni (Lovenno di Menaggio, 9-12 October 2023) on “The Roman Magisterium in the twentieth Century. New Perspectives from the Vatican Archives”, which provided further insights into the persistence of anti-modernist concerns during the pontificate of Pius XII, both at the level of the papal magisterium and in the vigilance and repression exercised by the Holy Office and other curial bodies (the workshop papers will be published in the next issue of JoMaCC). It is precisely the deepening insight into the documentation preserved in the Vatican archives which constitutes one of the main challenges also for the development of research on modernism and anti-modernism in the Czech lands that awaits scholars in the coming years.

Dries Bosschaert’s and Maite De Beukeleer’s article develops the case of the Auxiliaires de l’Apostolat, a group of active lay women established in 1917 in the Archdiocese of Mechelen in Belgium which combined a Christian vocation with a professional life. The article analyzes its foundation and early development in the 1920s and 1930s, its search for canonical recognition between 1928 and the early 1960s, and the breakthrough that came during the Second Vatican Council with the integration of its identity into the conciliar constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, n. 41, dedicated to the multi-fold exercise of holiness. This article also offers the opportunity to reflect on two areas of tension: that of agency, since the Auxiliaires were women who were unable to both take vows and at the same live in the world such as priests, and that of the tension between the local and global, as a seamless diocesan recognition did not result in an equally seamless recognition by the Sacred Congregation of the Council. The article allows us to delve into a historical experience that is less well known so far, but which had its own evident ecclesial relevance (at the time of the beginning of Vatican II more than two hundred Catholic bishops hosted Auxiliares in their dioceses) and was part of a broader emergence of lay initiatives whose members wanted to live a life of perfection according to the evangelical counsels, albeit one that takes place ‘in the world’. The article also helps to show how an approach to the Second Vatican Council from the perspective of women can provide new insights into the Second Vatican Council as a whole, and can also be linked to the previous special issue of JoMaCC «Breaking Through the Stained-Glass Ceiling? Case Studies on Female Catholicism and Its Transnational Developments Since the 1950s» JoMaCC, 2023 2(1).

The last two articles in this issue deal with aspects and issues related to Christianity in the United States of America, with particular attention to the implications for social and political orientations and choices, especially those related to the conservative currents and movements of North American Christianity. Because of the role that the USA plays in contemporary history, the influence that the internal

dynamics of churches and Christian movements have, at least indirectly, on the more general dynamics of global Christianity in the late 20th and early 21st centuries is evident. Fulvia Dellavedova's article analyses conservative Christians in the 1990s, specifically neo-conservative Catholics and their reaction to John Paul II's 1991 encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (a landmark in the debate on Catholic social teaching and its various interpretations) and its social doctrine. This was read as the Catholic Church finally embracing economic liberalism, although progressive Catholics rejected this view and contextualised the development of Catholic social teaching differently. The author considers the publications of Michael Novak and Richard Neuhaus, who show both partisan bias in their interpretation of *Centesimus Annus* and a political and economic agenda. The article shows that John Paul II's encyclical soon became a battleground for the conflict between neo-conservative and progressive Catholics, and a landmark in the debate over Catholic social teaching and its various interpretations.

Alberto Concina's article examines the political evolution of the US Religious Right in the 1990s and its changes to adapt to the political scenario, helping conservative Christian groups to transform themselves from an electoral constituency into a more effective political bloc. Through the lens of bio-political issues – particularly the abortion debate, which affected the relationship between the Religious Right and the Republican Party during the Reagan presidency – the author argues that “conservative Christians significantly changed their behavior by adopting a new approach to politics built on give-and-take logic and acceptance of gradualism as a legitimate strategy, which follows from the idea that gradual but steady victories yield more results than landmark decisions” (see *infra*, 74-5). Without losing sight of the ultimate goal of overturning *Roe v. Wade* – the 1973 Supreme Court decision that protected the right to abortion and was overturned in 2022 – the Religious Right pursued the achievement of smaller political goals to undermine abortion practices, following a more pragmatic approach that secured them both a prominent position in the political arena and a winning cultural influence in the 2000s. The analysis is based on articles published in *Christianity Today*, the flagship magazine of moderate US evangelicalism.

Finally, Piercamillo Falivene's article assesses the attitude of the Christian Churches to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, with particular reference to the Catholic Church and the Holy See, on the one hand, and the Russian Orthodox Church and the Moscow Patriarchate, on the other, as well as the main ecclesiastical institutions operating in the Ukrainian context. This article takes stock of a tragic war that is far from over. In the light of the sources available today, and in a scenario made more difficult by the instrumental propaganda of the war, it accurately records the main interventions of the churches

during the course of the conflict and the resulting impact on ecumenical relations. It also looks at the more general relations between the Holy See and the Moscow Patriarchate, considering the ecumenical dialogue and the relationship between the Christian Churches in the background, in their articulations at the level of religion, human rights and action in society. What emerges is a scenario marked by uncertainties, in the context of an apparent rebalancing of geopolitical relations in the world, which also affects those between the Churches. This does not detract from the fact that, even in the absence of the divisions of Stalinist memory, the Churches can, in the current context, play a relevant role in orienting international public opinion in favour of peace rather than fomenting war.

# Czech Catholic Modernism The Renewal of Catholic Literature Combined with Social and Ecclesiastical Reform

Tomáš Petráček

University of Hradec Kralove, Czech Republic

**Abstract** In Central Eastern Europe the theme of the modernist crisis in the ecclesial milieu is still a hotly debated topic. In the Czech lands this phenomenon differs in a number of moments from other countries, for instance in that the Czech reformers openly called themselves modernists willingly since 1895, as the protagonists of the revival movement of Catholic literature. This study is divided into three parts. The first one outlines the development of Czech historiography of the modernist and anti-modernist crisis in the Czech lands, which has undergone a dynamic development especially in the last thirty years. In the second part, it summarizes its results and the current state of knowledge of this historical phenomenon. The author focuses here on the specific and unique elements of Czech modernism, for the understanding of which a broader historical context of the church history of the Czech lands is necessary. In the third part the author presents the current challenges and prospects of research in this area.

**Keywords** Modernist movement. Modernist crisis. Czech lands history. Czechoslovak Church.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 On the Development of Czech Catholic Modernism Studies. – 3 Social Character and Other Specific Traits of Czech Modernism. – 3.1 The Historical Roots and Context of the Czech Modernist Movement. – 3.2 Directions of Renewal in the Czech Catholic Clergy. – 3.3 The Expansion of the Movement and Its Premature Fall. – 4 Challenges for the Research on Catholic Modernism in the Czech Lands.



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## 1 Introduction

Like in other Catholic countries, there was an attempt in the Czech lands at the turn of the 20th century for the renewal of ecclesiastical thought and life by a group of priests, who would later be called modernists and who were stopped in their efforts after 1907 by official church bodies. The Czech reformers differ in a number of respects from other European groups, for instance in that they openly called themselves ‘modernists’ proudly and willingly from 1895, namely as the protagonists of the revival movement of Catholic literature known as Czech Catholic modernism. Still, it seems more accurate to speak of modernizing clergymen, persons, who sought to renew various areas of ecclesial life. I will divide my paper into three parts. The first one will outline the development of Czech historiography of the modernist crisis in the Czech lands, which has undergone a dynamic development especially in the last thirty years. In the second part, I will try to summarize its results and the current state of knowledge of this historical phenomenon, where we focus on the specific elements of Czech modernism, for the understanding of which, a broader historical context of the church history of the Czech lands is necessary. In the third part I will present the current challenges and prospects of research in this area.

In Central Eastern Europe the theme of the modernist crisis in Catholicism is still a hotly debated topic on which even professional church historians must walk as if on eggshells. The vocabulary and discourse of the (repressive) ‘winners’ is still commonly used, which at most speak of blunders, but which, however, excuses them by the complexity of the situation and the benefit of bringing together the ecclesiastical ranks for future confrontations with the liberal state and totalitarian regimes. The timeliness of the question and its high sensitivity, at least in the Czech (but also Polish, Hungarian or Slovak) ecclesiastical milieu, which did not go through an open historical and theological discussion as in Western Europe, were shown, for example, by the debates that led to the special issue of the *Salve* theological journal on the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the crucial anti-modernist documents.<sup>1</sup> Inside the editorial board there was an at times heated discussion about whether and to what extent the issue should reflect the results of the forty-year research into the phenomenon of modernism and the new perspectives of modern church historiography on it, and whether the Czech ecclesial public was ready to handle this view. Obviously, it is no coincidence that the issue was only on the bookstore counters for a short

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1 Cf. *Salve. Revue pro teologii a duchovní život*, 17(3), 2017.

time, and it was the only issue of this theological review, which had been sold out before the next issue came out.

In the Czech milieu historical works, which attempt to impose a sobriety and objectivity on a theme which is burdened by its interpretation and value, and which want to show the complexity of the issue without clichés and simplifications, without a kitsch narration of the evil and tricky modernists and the heroic and vigilant antimodernists led by Pope Pius X, but also without a tendency to completely flip the gaze with the exchange of positive and negative signs, which is again something that can neither benefit real knowledge of the issue nor an understanding of the forces and trends that were in play, still encounter ideologically motivated criticism. There has been a significant shift in the field of historical research, but the reception of current Czech and international research on modernism still lags behind in the ecclesiastical circles.

## 2 On the Development of Czech Catholic Modernism Studies

The history of the research of the phenomenon of modernism and anti-modernism in the Czech lands can be divided into four main phases. It begins relatively early, even if we ignore the contemporary self-justificatory memoranda, declarations and memoirs of the protagonists of the modernist crisis themselves. One of the specifics of the Czech clash of modernism and integralism at the beginning of the 20th century is the fact that, with some chronological delay<sup>2</sup> and due to favourable historical circumstances in the form of the disintegration of the Austrian Catholic confessional monarchy in 1918, a national church would be established, which would hold Catholic modernism as one of the main sources of inspiration and most of its founders belonged to the spiritual streams of Czech reform Catholicism of the beginning of the 20th century in comparison with other western countries. After a two-year struggle, nearly two hundred originally Catholic modernist<sup>3</sup> priests founded on January 8<sup>th</sup> 1920, a new Czechoslovak church, whose theological roots rely, *inter alia*, on the necessity of reconciling religion with modern science and the idea of progress. Thus at least one strictly, consciously and admittedly 'modernist Church' emerged in Europe. This Church was definitely

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<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the largest Czech modernist trial, the indictment of the translation of the Bible into Czech from modernist elements, did not appear until 1925, cf. Petráček, *Bible a moderní Kritika*, 193-203.

<sup>3</sup> Here the designation 'modernist' in the spirit of the encyclical *Pascendi* is fully deserved.

not just an unimportant religious society, because in the 1920s and 1930s it gained over a million believers, aspiring to the role of the main national Church and its newly built churches became the architectural decoration of practically all of the Czech towns.<sup>4</sup>

It is precisely in the milieu of the newly established Czechoslovak church that the phenomenon of Czech modernism is studied, on the one hand during the first Czechoslovak Republic (1918-38), which can be described as the first phase of the development of the study of the Czech modernist movement, and then even during the communist totalitarian regime, which otherwise systematically suppressed church and religious history, which can be described as the second phase. We can find here all the typical elements and limits of such a historiography, such as the heroization of the beginnings of the church which are placed into the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The associated cult of the founding fathers was led first of all by the first patriarch Karel Farský.<sup>5</sup> At the same time a genealogy or continuity between the modernist crisis and the new church was constructed, which in addition to the history of the Czech modernist movement dealt with the entire tradition of the Czech Catholic reform thinking of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, research by historians from the circle of the Czechoslovak church laid a good foundation for future historical work,<sup>6</sup> whereas the Catholic side in this period presented rather one-sided critical reflections,<sup>7</sup> which is understandable in the period of confessional polemics of the first twenty years, when the opposing Churches fought for church buildings and believers. Due to the dramatic political circumstances more profound historical studies were not possible in the subsequent period from 1939 till 1989.<sup>8</sup>

After the 1989 democratic revolution, research opportunities improved considerably, and the existing institutional and ideological limits were lifted. The phenomenon of Czech and Moravian Catholicism and its social and political engagement at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century also attracted researchers from the Faculty of Arts of Olomouc University, where Professor Pavel Marek excelled in his long series of publications.<sup>9</sup> From studies dealing mainly with the

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<sup>4</sup> Marek, *Církevní krize na počátku první Československé republiky (1918-1924)*, 212-52. Cf. also Jurek, *Kleine Kirche*.

<sup>5</sup> See the telling title of the book: Farský, *Zpode jha*.

<sup>6</sup> Selectively, see Kaňák, *Z dějin reformního úsilí českého duchovenstva*; Kučera, Lašek, *Modernismus, historie nebo výzva? Studie ke genezi českého katolického*.

<sup>7</sup> Cinek, *Církev zbudovaná na frázích; K náboženské otázce v prvních letech naší samostatnosti*.

<sup>8</sup> Kadlec, *Přehled českých církevních dějin*, 2, 230-7.

<sup>9</sup> Only selectively, see: Marek, *Apologetové nebo kacíři?*; Marek et al., *Bez mýtů, předsudků a iluzí*; Marek, *Český katolicismus 1890-1914*.



socio-Christian political stream he came to the study of prominent personalities of the modernist movement and transferred adequate contemporary theoretical and interpretative approaches of Western historiography to this phenomenon in the Czech milieu. A group of historians professing the Catholic tradition and studying the phenomenon of Moravian Catholicism of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries around Professor Jiří Hanuš and the Centre for the Study of Democracy and Politics in the second Moravian metropolis in Brno significantly contributed to this. In addition, the translations, edition of sources and theoretical works of this group significantly shifted the level of historical and theological reflection of this phenomenon in the Czech milieu. Throughout the 1990s and in the first decade of this century, research by the Czechoslovak church historians continued, but unlike the 1990s, it devoted less theoretical research to modernism and its history,<sup>10</sup> placing greater emphasis on the history of the church after its foundation.<sup>11</sup> In the 1990s, the phenomenon was also covered by historians and theologians from the Hidden Church (*ecclesia silentii*), a part of the Catholic church living in secrecy during the Communist regime and continuing its activities after 1989, especially its Prague community.<sup>12</sup> Overall, however, it can be stated that thanks to the systematic research work, the knowledge of Czech modernism is on a solid level and it is clearly the most thoroughly studied issue within the Czech ecclesiastical history of the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

A further shift in the knowledge of the phenomenon of Czech modernism occurred after 2007. Part of the narrative concerning Czech modernism was the traditional claim that Czech modernism did not show a deep interest in the theological struggles around 1900 and had a purely reformist Catholic character. As it turns out, this is not the case. At least in the field of biblical science, the Czech Catholic progressive 'modernizing' exegesis was entirely at the level of contemporary European biblical science in any other country, and in its most profiled personality (Vincent Zapletal OP) significantly penetrated into the dramatic history of this discipline at the time of the antimodernist crisis.<sup>13</sup> Many Czech theologians followed their Western European colleagues in a dire fate that led them away from the pursuit of scholarly modern exegesis and into differing retreat

<sup>10</sup> Kučera, Lášek, *Modernismus, historie nebo výzva?*; Kučera, Kořalka, Lášek, *Živý odkaz modernismu*.

<sup>11</sup> Frýdl, *Reformní náboženské hnutí v počátcích Československé republiky*; Hrdlička, *Život a dílo Prof. Františka Kováře. Příběh patriarchy a učence*.

<sup>12</sup> Dolejšová, Hradílek, *Budoucnost modernismu?*.

<sup>13</sup> Weiß, *Modernismus und Antimodernismus im Dominikanerorden*; For example, the Dominican Bible scholar Vincent Zapletal (1867-1938), see Petráček, *Výklad Bible v době (anti-)modernistické krize. Život a dílo Vincenta Zapletala*; cf. shorter version in French, *Le Père Vincent Zapletal O.P. (1867-1938)*.

strategies. But their thoughts, methods and approaches, results and motivation are entirely comparable with people like M.-J. Lagrange in France<sup>14</sup> or Franz von Hummelauer in Germany.<sup>15</sup> It can be hoped that by studying the history of Czech Catholic theology, other interesting phenomena will be revealed that will further rehabilitate Czech theological thinking and correct too easily pronounced judgments about its inferiority, mediocrity and general uninterestingness.

In recent years, several projects have emerged that significantly change our knowledge of the overall context of the modernist movement in the Czech lands at the turn of the 20th century. Interesting new works on anti-clericalism in the Czech lands,<sup>16</sup> studies on priestly identities and their changes in the 19th-20th centuries have been written<sup>17</sup> or most recently on the phenomenon of Czech ultramontanism in the Central European context.<sup>18</sup> Catholic modernism has also become a subject for literary science and literary history,<sup>19</sup> including a series of editions of important documents.<sup>20</sup> A large number of specialized studies have also been created, such as critical biographies of important actors.<sup>21</sup> Recently, works reflecting the Catholic women's movement and its emancipatory efforts in Czech Catholicism at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have also appeared.<sup>22</sup>

### 3 Social Character and Other Specific Traits of Czech Modernism

#### 3.1 The Historical Roots and Context of the Czech Modernist Movement

In the traditional historical interpretation of Czech modernism in the Czech historiography, it bore the character of a reform Catholicism and was entirely intellectually derived from German 'Reformkatholizismus'.<sup>23</sup> Czech personalities are, for instance, completely

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<sup>14</sup> Montagnes, *Marie-Joseph Lagrange*.

<sup>15</sup> On other personalities in context, see Petráček, *Bible a moderní kritika*, 53-80.

<sup>16</sup> Balík et al., *Český antiklerikalismus*.

<sup>17</sup> Fasora et al., *Kněžské identity v českých zemích (1820-1938)*, 7-14, 131-80.

<sup>18</sup> Fasora et al., *Papežství a fenomén ultramontanismus v českých zemích*.

<sup>19</sup> Putna, *Česká katolická literatura v evropském kontextu 1848-1918*, 261-328.

<sup>20</sup> Kohout, Marek, Svozil, *Korespondence katolické moderny*.

<sup>21</sup> Havel, *František Reyl*.

<sup>22</sup> Havelka, *Katolické političky? Český katolický feminismus (1896-1939)*.

<sup>23</sup> Marek believes that "not a single original thinker was found among the Czech modernists" and that "theological modernism was almost absent" in Marek, *Český katolicismus 1890-1914*, 294.

absent from the synthetic work of Claus Arnold, although otherwise its scope is admirably pan-European.<sup>24</sup> Except for some specificities in the form of references to supposed roots like Hussitism and the Unity of the Czech Brethren, Czech modernism at first glance can truly appear to be an unattractive derivative of German Reform Catholicism, although in fact it represents an interesting European case in several important areas.

But let us return to the beginning. Czech church history experienced several dramatic transformations, when part of the country's population belonged to the Hussite movement during the 15<sup>th</sup> century, while the confessional map of the Czech lands became even more complicated during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In any case, after the Battle of the White Mountain, the state forced a re-Catholicisation of the population, which affected about 85% of the population in Bohemia. Nevertheless, the religiously Catholic character of the higher and folk culture of the Czech lands deep was undisputed well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century; the re-Catholicization was carried out thoroughly and in depth.<sup>25</sup>

As in other European countries, the position of the Catholic Church in society began to change through the secularisation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Industrialization and urbanization took place here quite early, for which the Czech ecclesiastical elites were not prepared, and a large part of the new social strata of workers and entrepreneurs left the Church. In particular, the lower clergymen were the protagonists of the 'national revival', they stood at the birth of modern Czech language nationalism, but due to their position within a privileged state church in the Austrian monarchy they could not use this merit to greater appeal for the fusion of national and religious identity like in the case of the Polish or Slovak nations.<sup>26</sup> This becomes evident when the emerging national elites choose an intrinsically anti-Catholic concept of the historical narrative of the Czech nation, allowing them to define themselves against the Habsburg dynasty and the Austrian monarchy and to justify the pursuit of their political goals. Already in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Czech lands were characterized by the development of a dual tradition of historical memory, one originally Catholic based on the cult of the Bohemian saints and devotion to the Habsburg dynasty (to save Catholicism in the country) and the nationally progressive tradition, which on the contrary built on the non-Catholic periods of Czech history and celebrated the legacy of historical personalities such as M. Jan

<sup>24</sup> Arnold, *Kleine Geschichte des Modernismus*, 158-60

<sup>25</sup> Louthan, *Converting Bohemia*.

<sup>26</sup> Petráček, *In the Maelstrom of Secularisation, Collaboration and Persecution*, 23-5.

Hus, the Hussite commander Jan Žižka and the bishop of the Unity of the Brethren Jan Amos Comenius.<sup>27</sup>

Already at the end of the 19th century, the position of Czech Catholicism was very complicated; at a time of raging nationalism, a contradiction between authentic Czechism and Catholicism was postulated – with good conscience and awareness, one could supposedly not adhere to both. At the same time 90% of the populace still figured in the Catholic registries of course. The connection with the Habsburg state rather harmed the Church, the clergy encountered manifestations of resistance in the public, there was a hidden *Kulturkampf*. Even in the countryside, the natural popular mass Catholicism was beginning to disintegrate. In Moravia, these processes took place later and with less intensity, so it was logical that many Catholic clergy endeavours began here, in order to prevent the disintegration of ecclesiastical life that was already seen in Bohemia.<sup>28</sup>

At the end of the 19th century, the Czech Catholic clergy still had more motivation and reasons to think about the need for change and reform than in other neighbouring countries. Moreover, it could rely on the older domestic tradition of Catholic reform impulses, which went back to the Enlightenment and the ‘Jacobin’ clergy with sympathy for the ideas of the French Revolution,<sup>29</sup> of the 1830s or of the revolutionary years of 1848-49.<sup>30</sup> Though not fulfilled, the idea of reviving Christianity and the Church and changing course away from ultramontane Catholicism was still alive despite all attempts to systematically suppress it in the clergy, and modernizing authors would soon proudly claim all the relevant personalities and their legacy.<sup>31</sup>

### 3.2 Directions of Renewal in the Czech Catholic Clergy

One can discern two directions of renewal, whose origins date back to the 1890s, when the appeals of Pope Leo XIII began to operate in combination with the increasing pressure of modernization and secularization and also in the Czech milieu the arrival of a strong generation of prominent priestly personalities. The Czech modernist movement was a matter of the clergy; lay figures were involved only in political and literary activities. The first topic of renewal concerned the revival of Catholic literature, the enhancement of its aesthetic

<sup>27</sup> On the construction of historical memory in terms of Hussitism and Czech history, cf. Rak, *Bývalí Čechové. České historické mýty a stereotypy*, 51-62.

<sup>28</sup> Petráček, *In the Maelstrom of Secularisation, Collaboration and Persecution*, 25-8.

<sup>29</sup> Tinková, *Jakobíni v sutaně*.

<sup>30</sup> Schultze-Wessel, *Revolution und religiöser Dissens*, 37-70.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Kaňák, *Z dějin reformního úsilí českého duchovenstva*.

quality, especially following the French example, which provided the opportunity to discuss openly many questions about the position of religion and Church in modern society. As this was a movement of young priests, part of it was a demarcation against the older conservative generation of Czech priestly elites. Literature played an important role in constructing national and individual identities;<sup>32</sup> the reformers regarded an increase in its quality as a tool for restoring influence on society and at the same time legitimizing the position of Catholicism as the main thought direction of the present.<sup>33</sup> Many clergymen saw the ideal state in the connection between the priesthood and writing activity.<sup>34</sup> The main platform for reform were journals around which there were circles of modernizing priests. It was the literary criticism of this artistic revival within the Catholic Church that was called Catholic modernism, a name which the members proudly took as their own.<sup>35</sup> In 1895 the almanac *Pod jedním praporem* (Under One Banner) was published, to which 51 Catholic authors contributed.

The profiling personalities in these circles were Karel Dostál-Lutinov and Sigismund Bouška and although they began their activities already around 1892, they formed as Czech Catholic Modernity only at the Prague congress in August 1897, where nearly 150 participants gathered. In addition to literary and artistic issues, there were papers and discussions on the topic of liturgical renewal and social issues. A programmatic speech explicitly mentioned the necessity that “the Christian revolution of life – social, political and religious – must be in step with our literary revolution”.<sup>36</sup> The above-mentioned papers and published magazines demonstrated how well the Czech milieu was familiar with contemporary similarly tuned authors from the German milieu, Herman Schell, Albert Ehrhard, Franz Xaver Kraus, but also Italian authors such as Geremia Bonomelli and Romolo Murri.

The second direction was a Christian-social movement, which developed rapidly in the 1890s in an effort to organize politically the Catholic population and mobilize it to defend Christian values and the positions of the Catholic Church in society at the time of the expansion of the general suffrage.<sup>37</sup> From the beginning, it suffered from fragmentation into a number of competing streams and until 1918 it

<sup>32</sup> Boldt, *Kultur versus Staatlichkeit*, 69-71.

<sup>33</sup> Putna, *Česká katolická literatura v evropském kontextu 1848-1918*, 34-5.

<sup>34</sup> Holát, *František Teplý-archivář a kněz*, 48.

<sup>35</sup> Frýdl, *Reformní náboženské hnutí v počátcích Československé republiky*, 23.

<sup>36</sup> Marek, *Apologetové nebo kacíři? Studie a materiály k dějinám české Katolické moderny*, 83.

<sup>37</sup> General equal suffrage for men was introduced in 1906, see Urban, *Česká společnost 1848-1918*, 518-30.

failed to transform itself into a truly effective political force. However, it played a role in bringing together both engaged priests and lay people whose ambition was to reform society, but also all institutions in it, including the Catholic Church.<sup>38</sup> Political engagement, nevertheless, was a thorn in the eye of the local Church hierarchy, which eventually banned the profiling magazine *Nový život* (New Life).<sup>39</sup> The hierarchy tried to discourage the clergy from political life through investigations and canonical visitations of the priests who were critical of their bishops for their passivity (Jan Šrámek, Josef Svozil). There were attempts to push the most agile of them to the margins (Emil Dlouhý-Pokorný).<sup>40</sup> Many figures then combined activity in both main directions of reform, literary and social-political.<sup>41</sup>

Both of these directions then merged at the only at the Velehrad congress in August 1899 and were joined by other prominent personalities. In the area of ecclesiastical matters, they were mainly interested in a pastoral streamlining of the Church's activities and adjustments to practical life that would bring religion closer to modern man. It arose from a broadly debated 'priestly question', discussing the role of a priest in contemporary society, in particular the issues of material well-being, patronage law, celibacy, and the relationship with the emerging civil elites; especially teachers that were emancipated even within the Austrian monarchy and freed themselves from a past when the schools were under the supervision and control of the clergy. The teachers had reserved an almost hostile relationship with the Church and religion and struggled with the clergy for the position of the intellectual and moral leadership of the local communities.<sup>42</sup>

The motivation of priests like Karel Dostál-Lutinov<sup>43</sup> was the revival of the nation through the renaissance of Catholicism at all levels, artistic, religious, social and political. They strove for a revival of Catholicism because they believed in its potential to stimulate the development of society and, as a modern line of thought, wanted to put it again at the centre of events and developments. At the same time, they were experiencing the apparent deviation of a large part of society and culture from religion and Catholicism, and the inadequacy of the Catholic Church's contemporary form and its forms of proclamation and ministry, perceiving the need to cope with scientific

<sup>38</sup> On political Catholicism in the Czech lands before WWI, see Marek, *Český katolicismus*, 115-66.

<sup>39</sup> Soldán, *Karel Dostál-Lutinov a Nový život*, 63-96.

<sup>40</sup> Marek, *Emil Dlouhý-Pokorný*, 145-50.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Marek, Trapl, *Mons. František Světlík (1875-1949)*, 23-39.

<sup>42</sup> Petráček, *In the Maelstrom of Secularisation, Collaboration and Persecution*, 40-1.

<sup>43</sup> On the various sources of his thought, see Soldán, *Karel Dostál-Lutinov a Nový život*, 7-30.

discoveries and political and social transformations of the modern era. This required putting aside the passivity and repetition of traditional approaches and the need to search for new expressions and forms.<sup>44</sup> Like modernizing clergy in other countries, Czech modernists emphasized that Catholic modernism was as old as Catholicism itself: at all times, men appeared indicating that the Church had to adapt to new circumstances in certain minor matters, and that in certain essential things it had to return to the old arrangements and principles, to Christ and the Gospel. The aim was to reconcile the new era with the Catholic faith by appropriate reforms, to rectify the external practice of the Church, without interfering in any way with the questions of doctrine.<sup>45</sup>

On the pages of the modernist journals in 1896 through 1907, general and specific criticism of the bishops appears; the debate was extensive: on celibacy, its non-observance and possibly making it voluntary, reform of the breviary, and the introduction of the vernacular into the liturgy.<sup>46</sup> Criticism of the bishops and their over-affiliation with the state, their exaggerated calls for obedience from the priests, broaching the celibacy questions, informing about the modernising authors in Germany, Austria and Italy led to their magazines being banned and the creation of new ones, published under pseudonyms and radicalizing some members.<sup>47</sup>

In May 1902 in the Czech lands, the Land Unity of the Bohemian Catholic Clergy emerged as the corporate organization of the Catholic clergy, which achieved recognition from both the ecclesiastical and state authorities. The movement, which began with the demand for the revival of Catholic literature and art, gradually transformed itself into a movement demanding social, national and ecclesiastical reforms. Here, we can discern another important specific element of Czech 'modernism'. As the capable leaders of this organization found compromise formulations of their demands without demanding direct doctrinal changes, the Czech modernizing movement had a mass base, representing at the time of its dissolution 2.375 priests.<sup>48</sup> Members of higher ecclesiastical circles, such as canons and holders of Monsignor titles and other prominent publicly known personalities of Czech Catholicism were involved in its activities.<sup>49</sup> By joining the Unity, they tried to influence its further development and direction,

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<sup>44</sup> Marek, *Apologetové nebo kacíři?*, 88.

<sup>45</sup> Dostál-Lutinov, *Nový život*, 7(10), 1902, 275-6.

<sup>46</sup> On the development of the Czech liturgical movement, see Kopeček, *Liturgické hnutí v českých zemích a pokoncilní reforma*, 100-49.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Marek, *Emil Dlouhý-Pokorný*, 153-68.

<sup>48</sup> Frýdl, *Reformní náboženské hnutí v počátcích Československé republiky*, 29.

<sup>49</sup> Such as Baar, Kroiher or Dvořák

as conscientious church leaders were also aware of the need to do something to change the secularization trends in Czech society. This is related to a second peculiarity of the Czech situation, namely that in Bohemia and Moravia the Catholic modernist movement had a mass character with large participation of the local Czech-speaking Catholic clergy and was truly organizationally connected,<sup>50</sup> including regular meetings with the participation of nearly three hundred members, although the internal diversity was still high.

### 3.3 The Expansion of the Movement and Its Premature Fall

The movement soon encountered resistance on the part of the bishops, as the text of the reformer Karel Dostál-Lutinov of 1903 tells us, where right in his introduction he admits that they had begun as “Church properly celebrating”, restoring ecclesiastical art, and did not even think of reforming Church. Nevertheless, a portion of the hierarchy instigated investigations, closings, bans, expulsions of theologians and a press campaign against the movement. Young priests full of idealism and enthusiasm for the Catholic Church embarked on a cultural struggle. They tried to defend the Church against the secular world, but except for the field of art they could not fulfil their aspirations. Concerning the problem of faith and modern science, they were only poorly prepared by their ecclesiastical formation, concerning the social question they could not overlook the misery and inequality in their own priestly ranks: how could it be claimed that the Church was on the side of freedom, when priests were not allowed to read what they wanted, how to defend the order of the family, when one looked at the consequences of celibacy, and when even in the national area the representatives of the Church committed injustices. The young priests recognized that the reform of life had to come with the reform of literature, and so Catholic modernism unwittingly found itself among the reformers. Because they called for healing, they were rebuked as traitors and expelled from the Church. They were opposed by Church conservatives and by enemies of the Church at the same time. Catholic modernism might be stifled, but its ideas had to prevail.<sup>51</sup> This text from 1903 demonstrates that despite distrust and opposition from local bishops and episcopal ordinariates, modernizing priests would not let themselves become discouraged and continued to pursue their activities.

At the assemblies and congresses, most maturely and complexly then at the Third Congress in Přerov in July 1906, the movement

<sup>50</sup> Marek, *Emil Dlouhý-Pokorný*, 84-8.

<sup>51</sup> *Nový život*, 8(2), 1903, 50-1.



finally formulated a programme, which demanded the democratisation of the Church, the election of bishops, and fraternal relations between the bishops and priests, a greater influence of the laity on ecclesiastical affairs, the creation of a Czech patriarchate as a re-renewal of the tradition of Cyril and Methodius, making celibacy voluntary, a reform of the patronage right and an assurance of the material security of the clergy. There were also demands for the possibility of celebrating the liturgy in the vernacular, for reforming the teaching of religion in schools, for the freedom of association for the clergy to defend their interests, and for a theological education, which was adequate to contemporary challenges and allowed for autonomy in thought and character. In doing so, the priests repeatedly rejected the attacks on the Church and religion in society and emphasised their commitment to the papacy and the Church.<sup>52</sup>

In the growing atmosphere of the anti-modernist struggle, the Unity was increasingly confronted with the enmity of bishops who did not trust the priestly corporate organization, accused them of modernism and gradually banned one reform journal after another.<sup>53</sup> The escalating pressure culminated in a series of measures at the turn of 1906-07, such as the ban on reading the latest modernist magazine *White Banner* in November 1906. In February 1907 the bishops dissolved the Unity of the Catholic Clergy. As in Germany with measures of bishop Keppler against Reformkatholizismus in 1902, also the Czech modernising movement was suppressed by the bishops even before the actual papal decision, because they perceived it as a dangerous critical current precisely because of the representation of a large number of priests. After both papal anti-modernist documents were issued, the bishops' ordinariates confirmed the prohibition of the Unity as a modernist organization, the ban was confirmed also by the state bodies at the request of the bishops. As with modernizing authors in other countries, it was futile to argue that the Unity and the personalities organized in it were not affected by the papal anti-modernist documents.<sup>54</sup>

Attempts were also made to publish two journals in 1907 and 1908, where the legacy of the movement was formulated by the pen of Dostál-Lutinov.

Catholic, or Christian-democratic, modernism is on the side of the future, because it accentuates not only Catholicism, which is the religion of the Bohemian nation, but also Slaviness, cultivation, freedom and social reforms. Catholic modernism has a noble, harmonious, reasonably progressive programme on sound foundations. Even

<sup>52</sup> Frýdl, *Reformní náboženské hnutí v počátcích Československé republiky*, 28-9.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Marek, Trapl, *František Světlík*, 30-3.

<sup>54</sup> Frýdl, *Reformní náboženské hnutí v počátcích Československé republiky*, 30.

though it has been pushed down and crucified today, it will soon be resurrected with Christ.<sup>55</sup>

The relatively easy suppression of such a mass movement was due to a number of factors, starting with the generally high discipline and obedience of the clergy given by their formation in the priestly seminaries.<sup>56</sup> This includes the existential uncertainty fostered by the state's support for the state church. Furthermore, there were still civil laws that prevented ordained priests who had left ministry from marrying legally. Overall, not many priests left the Church; in many cases they were clergymen who had lost a religious type of faith and then found employment in civilian professions. But among those who left the Church were some of the leading representatives of Czech Catholic modernism.<sup>57</sup> Much more frequent reactions consisted in going into internal exile with feelings of disappointment and bitterness. The reform movement that broke out at the end of the First World War was then all the more intensive, before being ecclesiastically repressed after two years, leading to the establishment of a modernist National Czechoslovak Church.<sup>58</sup> A certain continuity could be maintained concerning literary modernism, where the Prague group was able to re-organize and to continue its work, albeit strictly confined to the revival of Catholic literature and art.<sup>59</sup>

#### 4 Challenges for the Research on Catholic Modernism in the Czech Lands

The Czech modernist movement had an apologetic tendency, it wanted to defend the place of the Church in society, which entailed the need for the Church to respond to the transformations of the world, society and science and to deal with them honestly. Marek states that Czech Catholic modernism was an integral part of the modernist tendency, but like this tendency in general it did not have time to mature, there was no real organised movement and programme, both of which remained in the undeveloped initial form. Czech Catholic modernism was to be only a reflection of and response to European reform efforts due to the absence of original ideas, of radicalism

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<sup>55</sup> Rozkvět, 1(13), 1907, 55, 30 March.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Petráček, *In the Maelstrom of Secularisation, Collaboration and Persecution*, 95-7.

<sup>57</sup> E.g. František Holeček, Emil Dlouhý-Pokorný, Ladislav Kunte, František Loskot, or Josef Svozil, yet it was a very small group of the several thousand members of the Unity, cf. Marek, *Emil Dlouhý-Pokorný*, 192.

<sup>58</sup> Schultze-Wessel, *Revolution und religiöser Dissens*, 117-76.

<sup>59</sup> Putna, *Česká katolická literatura v evropském kontextu*, 515-22

and a broader base.<sup>60</sup> While the first part of Marek's judgment corresponds to historical facts, the next assessment about the absence of a real program and a real movement character seems to be somewhat harsh. I believe that the demands of the Unity of the Catholic Clergy were clear, actually quite courageous and were based on their own tradition and the current situation, as well as inspired by the discussed reform steps in the German language space. It was a priestly reform movement, so their level of radicalism seems to be appropriate, they could hardly go further or deeper in their demands. With a few exceptions, as well trained and disciplined catholic priests they did not want to mobilize the laity or to establish a new church. But where else in Europe did such a broadly organized, at least modernizing movement, with a characteristic representation of a higher clergy, originate? Moreover, the situation was complicated by the severe exclusion of Catholicism from the national cultural and historical tradition in civil society and the close ties of the official Church to the state and its power structures. Despite all these limitations, they also attracted for their struggle collaborators who had a complicated relationship with Catholicism such as the writer Julius Zeyer, top artists such as Felix Jenewein and František Bílek. Their struggle was watched by the period press, and the radical politician Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk was also very interested in it.<sup>61</sup>

Despite all the reservations and the loss of positions, the Czech Catholic clergy at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century included very interesting personalities who carefully followed foreign spiritual and intellectual currents and creatively developed their own impulses for the restoration of ecclesial life. It is true that also in the Czech milieu, despite the claim of the Encyclical *Pascendi*, there were considerable differences in the ideological focus in the 'ranks' of the 'modernists' who in the Czech case formed a real movement but not a school. The suppression of the Unity led some leaders to increase their engagement in the field of the political-social Christian movement, which the bishops also did not view favourably, but could not forbid directly. As a result, after the end of the First World War, various smaller Christian parties could join together to form one influential party affecting the appearance of the First Czechoslovak Republic.<sup>62</sup>

One of the challenges facing Czech modernism and integralism is the need for deeper research in the archives in Rome. While we have the events in the Czech territory well described, partially also based on foreign sources of ecclesiastical and diplomatic provenance,

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Marek, *Apologetové nebo kacíři?*, 88.

<sup>61</sup> Šmíd, *Masaryk a česká Katolická moderna*.

<sup>62</sup> See Fiala et al., *Český politický katolicismus 1848-2005*, 183-4; Marek et al., *Jan Šrámek a jeho doba*, 405-48.

we lack the reflection of the relevant Roman bodies, especially the Congregation of the Holy Office.<sup>63</sup> The study of the opponents of the modernists, the figures of the integralist camp, works that would deal with their personalities, their arguments, and their mutual co-operation are even more absent.<sup>64</sup> Due to the political developments in Central-Eastern Europe, the relationship between state, church and religion is unexpectedly topical. The matter is not only about the knowledge and the treatment of the past. The main motive of the entire crisis was the answer to the question of how the Church and Christianity can and should cope with the dynamic transformation and development of society and the thinking of its time.

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<sup>63</sup> A preliminary evaluation of the reception of Pascendi in the Czech lands can be found in Weiß, *Reports*, 111s.

<sup>64</sup> We can use as an example the lecturer of the theological school of the congregation of the Redemptorists Václav Smolík, who issued a commented translation and interpretation of the Encyclical *Pascendi*: Smolík, *Encyklika*.

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# Reimagining Religious Life and Social Apostolate

## The Case of the *Auxiliaires de l'Apostolat*

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**Abstract** Throughout the twentieth century, the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat* shaped a new form of apostolate: being active as lay women in the modern world, while pursuing a life towards religious perfection. The life and position of these women was an often hard-to-understand identity in church and society, requiring them to constantly negotiate their own identity vis-à-vis institutional normative frameworks. The present contribution recounts their search for canonical recognition between 1928 and the early 1960s, and the breakthrough that comes during the Second Vatican Council.

**Keywords** Auxiliaires de l'Apostolat. Lay Apostolate. Catholic (lay) women. Second Vatican Council. Lumen Gentium.


**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 “Notre ‘Cercle’ d’Apôtres Sociales”: The *Auxiliaires de l'Apostolat*'s Origins and Development. – 3 The *Auxiliaires*' Pursuit for Recognition Within the Universal Church. – 4 Vatican II: A Pivotal Point in the Understanding of the Universal Call to Holiness. – 5 Conclusions.



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## 1 Introduction

Il n'est pas normale que 'Rome' continue d'ignorer – du moins de manière officielle – un 'fait d'Eglise' aussi important que celui de deux cents Evêques qui ont des Auxiliaires de l'Apostolat.<sup>1</sup>

*Dixit* a number of unnamed Cardinals on the eve of the Second Vatican Council, reflecting on the fact that a group of lay women, called the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat*, had not yet received any form of canonical recognition, despite their importance – by 1962, some 200 bishops worldwide had already called *auxiliaires*.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat* were not the only group to occupy this position at the time; they were part of a broader emergence of lay initiatives the members of which wanted to live a perfect life according to the evangelical counsels, albeit one that takes place 'in the world'. Without being religious people or secular institutes, there was simply no framework within Canon Law for such groups. For many of them, this canonical void demanded a decades-long commitment to receiving recognition of some sort.

The case of the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat* is a compelling one when examined against this background. Established in 1917 and supported by bishops and theologians, they were determined to receive this aforementioned recognition. Unfortunately, as the paraphrase of the Cardinals with which we started illustrates, there would still be no breakthrough by the start of the Second Vatican Council. Some Cardinals dared to express their hope that the Council would bring about change in this regard – in hindsight this was not unreasonable, given that certain unnamed authors behind the texts were well aware of the vocation of the *auxiliaires*, their importance, and their objective to recognize themselves in ecclesiastical documents. The present contribution develops the case of the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat* in three major phases: their establishment and early development in the 1920s and 1930s, their search for canonical recognition between 1928 and the early 1960s, and the breakthrough that came during the Second Vatican Council with the integration of their identity into the Church's self-understanding in *Lumen Gentium* 41.

Research on the history of the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat* is framed within multiple research fields. First, it contributes to research on the role played by women within the Catholic Church in the twentieth

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<sup>1</sup> Vulhopp, *Note sur une Éventuelle Intégration Plus Définie des Auxiliaires de l'Apostolat dans l'Église Universelle*, 26 May 1962.

<sup>2</sup> It is estimated that some 350 bishops worldwide called a total number of over 3,500 *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat* between 1917 and 2007. Zélis, "Service Sociale et Vie Concl sacrée", 673.

century. In recent years, greater attention has been paid to both female religious<sup>3</sup> and to the female laity. In addition, the upcoming role of the laity and religious have received substantial attention<sup>4</sup> – two themes that are also relevant to the history of the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat*. Second, it relates to research on the Second Vatican Council<sup>5</sup> and on the role played by women in specific. The ways in which women have contributed to the Council have not sufficiently been highlighted, even though women undeniably adopted important roles; some women, for example, were clearly publicly involved in the conciliar work as lay auditors, but women also directly and indirectly influenced the conciliar process behind the scenes.<sup>6</sup> The present contribution will demonstrate how approaching Vatican II from the female point of view can yield new insights into Vatican II as a whole, given that the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat* contributed to the Council.

## 2 “Notre ‘Cercle’ d’Apôtres Sociales”: The *Auxiliaires de l'Apostolat*’s Origins and Development

Most sister congregations were apostolic in nineteenth and twentieth century Belgium and, therefore, they were active in the world, engaging in education, health care, penitentiary care or youth care, among others.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, lay women would also engage themselves socially outside of this ecclesiastical structure in the early twentieth century. They were called ‘social workers’,<sup>8</sup> an umbrella term used to refer to women who taught, worked as nurses, or who took up an executive position in women’s movements. According to Ria Christens, their discourse would often be similar to that of the apostolic spirituality of certain women’s congregations during the Interbellum.<sup>9</sup> Certain lay women also remained celibate, especially since this allowed them to remain more autonomous.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See for instance Mangion, *Catholic Nuns and Sisters in a Secular Age*.

<sup>4</sup> See for instance Minvielle, *L'Apostolat des Laïcs à la Veille du Concile*; Dumons, *Femmes et Catholicisme en Europe*.

<sup>5</sup> For an overview of the current state of research on Vatican II, see Gaillardetz, *The Cambridge Companion to Vatican II*; Clifford, Faggioli, *The Oxford Handbook of Vatican II*, Roy-Lysencourt, *Bibliographie du concile Vatican II*.

<sup>6</sup> See for instance Heyder, Muschiol, *Katholikinnen und das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil*; Desmazières, “Généalogie d’un ‘Silence’ Conciliaire”.

<sup>7</sup> Suenens, Marcéls, “Vrouwelijke Religieuze Instituten”, 848.

<sup>8</sup> Baers, Letter to Mgr. Mercier, 3 June 1920.

<sup>9</sup> Christens, *Sociaal Geëngageerd en Ongehuwd*, 65, 72, 75.

<sup>10</sup> Christens, *Sociaal Geëngageerd en Ongehuwd*, 77-81; Duriez, “Introduction”, 16.

The 1920s and 1930s marked the development of Christian social women's organizations in Belgium. *Standsgdenken*<sup>11</sup> prevailed in this period, resulting in the creation of different autonomous women's organizations for every social group, such as rural or working-class people, in order to reach these groups.<sup>12</sup> There was a growing need for homogenously trained female executives with the emergence of such organizations. Such training was deployed during the First World War, and eventually led to the establishment of two schools in 1920: the *Katholieke Sociale Normaalschool* and the *École normale sociale catholique*, founded by Maria Baers and Victoire Cappe.<sup>13</sup>

In this context, members of the women's organization *Œuvres sociales féminines chrétiennes* (OSFC) noticed that their members wanted to participate in the apostolate in 1917, but feared that they would not be able to comply perfectly with the evangelical counsels outside monastery walls.<sup>14</sup> Social work and apostolic congregations were competing, in a sense, to win over young women with a vocation.<sup>15</sup> This worried the OSFC's management, who believed that there was a need for apostles who were in touch with different social milieus. There was a need for *ouvrières d'élite* above all, as the working class in particular was out of touch with religion and would benefit from an apostle who knew and worked within their environment. As a solution, they wished to start up a group – initially referred to as *le Cercle* – to offer young women an alternative to entering a convent. In a document dated 7 October 1917, they indicated to Archbishop Mercier of Mechelen how they saw the functioning of *le Cercle*.<sup>16</sup> It is unclear exactly who drafted the document, since it was not signed, but one can assume that it came from their leaders, general secretaries Maria Baers and Victoire Cappe, because it was written from the OSFC's point of view. On 28 March 1918, a few months after the draft of the OSFC's proposal, another group of the *Cercle* came together in Antwerp – which was part of the Archdiocese at that time.<sup>17</sup>

By 8<sup>th</sup> December 1918, an initial version of the statutes was finalized. Here, they write:

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**11** *Standsgdenken* is an untranslatable term. It is the notion that there are clear distinctions between different societal groups, for instance the working class, farmers, middle class...

**12** Christens, *Sociaal Geëngageerd en Ongehuwd*, 68-9, 81.

**13** Christens, *Sociaal Geëngageerd en Ongehuwd*, 68-9; Zélis, "Service Sociale et Vie Consacrée", 662; Cappe, Letter to Mgr. Mercier, 5 December 1920.

**14** Project Description, 7 October 1917; Harmignie, *Bref Historique de l'Association des Auxiliaires de l'Apostolat*, s.d.

**15** Zélis, "Service Sociale et Vie Consacrée", 663.

**16** Project Description, 7 October 1917.

**17** Vulhopp, Letter to Mgr. Mercier, 24 July 1920.

Le Cercle a pour but de grouper et d'aider les jeunes filles et les veuves, résolues à tendre à la perfection, par la pratique des conseils évangéliques, tout en vivant dans le monde, d'une manière analogue à celle des prêtres du clergé séculier, pour y travailler en union intime avec les évêques et sous leur dépendance immédiate à l'extension du règne de Dieu à faire pénétrer l'esprit de N[otre] S[eigneur] J[ésus] C[hrist] dans toute la vie sociale, particulièrement parmi les ouvriers et ouvrières par les oeuvres sociales chrétiennes.<sup>18</sup>

In the years that followed, the Archbishop would work together with the women to formally organize this *Cercle*.<sup>19</sup> The group started to grow and different women from different walks of life gradually entered, according to Pierre Harmignie's account from 1926. In response, the idea arose not to become an organization with one well-defined task, but instead to let the women be at the disposal of the bishop so that they could be mobilized wherever they were needed. Mercier agreed and saw lots of commonalities between the *Cercle* and secular priests – more specifically with the *Amis de Jésus*, a society of secular priests actively living the three vows in their diocesan activities which took shape under Mercier's lead between 1911 and 1923.<sup>20</sup> He gave the women their name, *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat*, as they were literally assisting the bishop in his apostolate. The *auxiliaires* drafted new statutes in 1921 in order to let their statutes correspond with this new vision.<sup>21</sup>

The first assembly of the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat* was organized in 1921. During this meeting, a group picture was taken – perhaps the only picture of the *auxiliaires* convening in this way.<sup>22</sup> In addition to approximately thirty women, Cardinal Mercier and Pierre Harmignie, who helped establish the group, were also present. Only Victoire Cappe and Maria Baers can be clearly recognized; unfortunately, no list with names has been preserved. However, we do know the names of certain women who were involved in those early days through some early documents, for instance Louise Colen with whom Victoire Cappe had corresponded about the *Cercle*, and in whose archives the group picture was found. There was also the

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<sup>18</sup> Statutes of 'le Cercle', 1918.

<sup>19</sup> Baers, Letter to Mgr. Mercier, 26 November 1920; Cappe, *Note Envoyée à l'É[vêque] avec les Statuts*, November 1920; Baers, *Note Envoyée à Son Éminence avec les Statuts du Cercle*, 26 November 1920.

<sup>20</sup> See in particular Lambert, *Mgr Georges Lemaître et les 'Amis de Jésus'*.

<sup>21</sup> Harmignie, *Bref Historique de l'Association des Auxiliaires de l'Apostolat*, s.d.

<sup>22</sup> Picture of Mgr. Mercier, Pierre Harmignie, and ca. 30 women with note on the back, 1921.

Antwerp *Cercle* led by Tilla Vulhopp. In 1920, Vulhopp delivered a list of eight members – herself included – to Cardinal Mercier.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the aforementioned *École normale sociale catholique*, not coincidentally founded by Maria Baers and Victoire Cappe, was a true recruitment pool for new *auxiliaires* according to Guy Zélis. 281 of the in total 1,199 students became *auxiliaires* between 1922 and 1939.<sup>24</sup> This should come as no surprise, given that these students were the perfect target audience for a social apostolate. The aforementioned concern that young social workers would be drawn to apostolic congregations turned out to be a realistic concern: the initiators of the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat* mentioned that someone had left or considered leaving the school or the *Cercle* on multiple occasions.<sup>25</sup>

### 3 The *Auxiliaires*' Pursuit for Recognition Within the Universal Church

After Cardinal Mercier's death on 23 January 1926, the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat* would continue to work under the auspices of the new Archbishop Van Roey. In 1927, Victoire Cappe died, and in 1931, Maria Baers lost her leadership position after a debate on the kind of leadership that the *auxiliaires* envisioned.<sup>26</sup> Tilla Vulhopp would come to the forefront. In the decades that followed, and up until the 1970s, she would correspond extensively with Archbishop Van Roey and with other prominent figures like Gerard Philips, Albert Dondeyne, and Giovanni Battista Dellepiane.<sup>27</sup> Many of these, Dondeyne and Philips in particular, would later play a role during and in the reception of the Second Vatican Council in the search for the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat*'s place in the Church. Their activities would be shaped by their theological knowledge and by these contacts; incidentally, these contacts could be very direct, in the case of Philips whose niece Marie-Thérèse Knapen was an *auxiliaire de l'Apostolat* as well for example.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Vulhopp, Letter to Mgr. Mercier, 24 July 1920.

<sup>24</sup> Zélis, "Service Sociale et Vie Consacrée", 670-2.

<sup>25</sup> For instance Baers, Letter to Mgr. Mercier, 3 June 1920; Vulhopp, Letter to Mgr. Mercier, 24 July 1920.

<sup>26</sup> Baers, Letter to Mgr. Van Roey, 11 March 1927; Baers, Letter to Mgr. Van Roey, 25 December 1927; *Élection du Conseil des Auxiliaires de l'Apostolat*, 1931.

<sup>27</sup> Correspondence can be found in for instance: Archives Cardinal Van Roey (Mechelen: Archdiocesan Archives); Archives Albert Dondeyne (1916-2005), Box 6.3 Auxiliaires de l'Apostolat/Medewerksters van het Apostolaat (Leuven: KU Leuven University Archives); Conciliar Archives of Gerard Philips (Leuven: KU Leuven Centre for the Study of the Second Vatican Council).

<sup>28</sup> Tshibangu Tshishiku, *Le Concile Vatican II et l'Église Africaine*.

Vulhopp and Mgr. Van Roey would try to acquire an approbation from the Sacred Congregation of the Council. Mgr. Caillot, the Bishop of Grenoble who had set up a local organization of the *auxiliaires* with the same statutes, took the same steps.<sup>29</sup> It would take several years of corresponding, at least one visit of Tilla Vulhopp to Rome, and multiple updates on the statutes, but the extensive output of documents perfectly illustrates how this process impacted the *auxiliaires'* identity formation. Multiple issues became prevalent. Firstly, it turned out to be difficult to let a novel phenomenon like the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat* fit in the existing structures of Canon Law. Secondly, while striving to fit in, the *auxiliaires* gradually had to change some terminology in their statutes. 'Vœux' (vows) in particular presented a problem, given that it implied a specific organizational structure that did not correspond with the rest of the statutes. Thirdly, the *auxiliaires* developed a clear understanding of their own identity and the concessions that they were or were not willing to make to protect this identity during this lengthy process. For decades, they would primarily have to define themselves towards the outside world as what they are not; it was only during the Second Vatican Council that they would start to recognize themselves in ecclesiastical documents.<sup>30</sup>

In 1928, Van Roey explicitly asked the Congregation of the Council not to approve the *auxiliaires* as a religious institute, but rather as a pious association, and to allow them to make public vows.<sup>31</sup> The *auxiliaires* argued that even though their way of life presupposed that they strived for perfection, they still needed a more flexible organization than a religious congregation and it was still necessary that they could make public vows in order to be committed to the service of the Church.<sup>32</sup> In 1931, and after Tilla Vulhopp personally met Cardinal Serafini, the Prefect of the Congregation of the Council, she learned that these aspects of the organization were problematic. Although the Congregation of the Council was in favor of their direct dependency upon the bishop and the lack of particularism in their spirituality, there were certain issues which needed further clarification – their vows being one of the most essential, as mentioned previously.<sup>33</sup> In her account of this meeting, Vulhopp does not explicitly

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<sup>29</sup> Note Envoyée à Mgr. Heylen, 15 November 1929.

<sup>30</sup> Certain *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat* have expressed this during conversations with us, and on the website of the *auxiliaires* of the diocese of Mechelen, *Lumen Gentium* 41 and *Ad Gentes* 41 are cited (n.n., *Evêque*. <https://auxibxl.org/index.php/eveque>). We will demonstrate how the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat* functioned as a source of inspiration for *Lumen Gentium* 41 elsewhere in this article.

<sup>31</sup> Van Roey, Letter, 10 October 1928.

<sup>32</sup> Note Envoyée à Mgr. Heylen, 15 November 1929.

<sup>33</sup> Vulhopp, Letter to Mgr. Van Roey, 14 October 1931.

share the opinion of the Congregation of the Council with respect to the vows, but instead stresses that if you look at the definition of public vows, then it becomes clear that those of the *auxiliaires* are public as well, since the bishop has the authority of the Church to accept them. However, doubts arose within the Congregation of the Council about whether or not the bishop had the authority to accept public vows outside of a religious congregation without first having consulted the Holy See, according to the existing Canon Law. In response, Vulhopp referred to the Amis de Jésus who received an approbation as a pious association and were allowed to take public vows in a similar way to the *auxiliaires*, which meant that if Canon Law did not explicitly foresee public vows for a pious association, then it should not prohibit it either.<sup>34</sup> However, even though Cardinal Mercier wanted the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat* to mirror the Amis de Jésus, their trajectory of recognition cannot be compared all that easily, because of the latter being an association of secular priests.

Instead, other lay groups were in a similar situation and were, therefore, better bases of comparison.<sup>35</sup> One comparator is the Congregation of the Franciscan Tertiary Social Reign of the Sacred Heart, founded by Agostino Gemelli and of Armida Barelli in 1919.<sup>36</sup> In 1931, Vulhopp and Gemelli corresponded on the issue, given that they were both waiting on a decision from the Congregation of the Council.<sup>37</sup> The *auxiliaires* were also supported by the Jesuit Joseph Creusen,<sup>38</sup> who was a well-known advocate for this new sort of group.<sup>39</sup> As mentioned previously, the OSFC leaders were concerned about young women choosing to enter an apostolic congregation, instead of living a life within society, prior to the foundation of the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat* in 1922. There was hope that the framework of the *auxiliaires* would be a suitable alternative for these women, but the mere existence of the framework was not always enough as it turned out. In 1932, the *auxiliaires* risked losing a member – ‘mademoiselle B.’ – because she wanted to live a perfect life and believed that this was not possible as an *auxiliaire*. She, therefore, preferred to enter

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<sup>34</sup> Vulhopp, Letter to Mgr. Van Roey, 14 October 1931.

<sup>35</sup> Teinturier, “Catholic Education in France in the Interwar Period”, 364-5.

<sup>36</sup> It exceeds the scope of this article to elaborate on Gemelli’s role in the development of secular institutes, but it is important to note that *Provida Mater Ecclesia* is partially based on his thoughts. See for instance: Gemelli, *Gli Istituti Secolari*; Ciccarelli, *Padre Gemelli e gli Istituti Secolari*.

<sup>37</sup> Gemelli, Letter to Tilla Vulhopp, 26 October 1931.

<sup>38</sup> Joseph Creusen (1880-1960) was a Belgian Jesuit priest and professor of canon law. Carpentier, “In Memoriam: le Père Joseph Creusen”.

<sup>39</sup> Vulhopp, Letter to Maurice Claeys Bouuaert and reply, 28 June 1932; Teinturier, “Catholic Education in France in the Interwar Period”, 365.



the congregation of the *Filles du Cœur de Marie*.<sup>40</sup> Utterly relevant in this passage is that this episode is a clear reflection of the more widespread conviction that the vocation to the perfect life could only come to completion within religious life; this is a conviction around which Vatican II would mark a turning point. In a letter about them possibly losing a member to religious life, Vulhopp sharply states that the *auxiliaires* are not a religious institute, but that certain canonists would like to put them in that box.<sup>41</sup>

In November 1932, Archbishop Van Roey was informed that it was necessary for the Congregation of the Council to reformulate the statutes such that the *auxiliaires* did not take public, but rather private vows, and that these vows had no legal effect, in order to receive an approbation.<sup>42</sup> By 1934, the requirements were even stricter, when Serafini sent Van Roey a list with suggestions for the statutes of the *auxiliaires*. The list mainly focusses on the word ‘vœux’ (vows), which had to be replaced with ‘promesses’ (oaths).<sup>43</sup> This goes beyond the initial request to formulate it as private instead of public vows; it entirely rejects the view that the *auxiliaires* could or were even allowed to make vows. The statutes were updated, while stressing that although they were no longer called vows, the oaths were still given to God.<sup>44</sup>

Elles [les promesses] ne sont pas de simples résolutions [...]. Ce sont de vrais engagements, des promesses qui lient. Elles sont faites à Dieu, entre les mains de l’Evêque. [...], il semble résulter que la substitution du mot promesse à celui de voeu ait pour intention de distinguer les engagements des Auxiliaires de ceux des religieuses, mais non de nier qu’ils soient des promesses faites à Dieu.<sup>45</sup>

New statutes were issued by approximately 1936 that referred to ‘donations’ and ‘engagements’.<sup>46</sup> These statutes would remain valid until at least the 1950s, with only minor corrections.<sup>47</sup> In 1947, the ap-

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<sup>40</sup> Vulhopp, Letter to Maurice Claeys Bouuaert and reply, 28 June 1932.

<sup>41</sup> Vulhopp, Letter to Maurice Claeys Bouuaert and reply, 28 June 1932.

<sup>42</sup> Joliet, Letter to Mgr. Van Roey, 25 November 1932.

<sup>43</sup> Serafini, Letter to Mgr. Van Roey, 15 March 1934; Sacred Congregation of the Council, *Erezione dell’Associazione delle ‘Auxiliaires de l’Apostolat’*, s.d. [15 March 1934].

<sup>44</sup> *Statuts de l’Association des Auxiliaires de l’Apostolat*, with edits, s.d. [edits ca. 1934]; *Questions Concernant l’Interpretation à Donner au Texte Modifié des Statuts*, s.d. [ca. 1934].

<sup>45</sup> *Questions Concernant l’Interpretation à Donner au Texte Modifié des Statuts*, s.d. [ca. 1934].

<sup>46</sup> *Statuts des Auxiliaires de l’Apostolat*, with edits, s.d. [original ca. 1936].

<sup>47</sup> *Statuts des Auxiliaires de l’Apostolat*, with edits, 1955.

ostolic constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia* offered an opportunity for the *auxiliaires* to finally receive recognition because it recognized secular institutes. However, the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat* did not fit in the framework of a secular institute, according to Lille's Bishop Achille Liénart, and would have to change their statutes if they wanted to fit in. Liénart plead against this, since this would mean that they would have to repeal certain elements that the *auxiliaires* deemed necessary to defining their identity, their dependency upon the bishop for instance. According to Liénart, the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat* were merely an association of the faithful.<sup>48</sup> The Congregation of the Council would also conclude that the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat* could not fall into the category of secular institutes, given that they lacked an institutional structure.<sup>49</sup>

Despite some canonical opening-up and the *auxiliaires'* efforts to update the statutes according to the Congregation of the Council's suggestions, the *auxiliaires* had still not received recognition – a standstill that would continue throughout the 1950s. In the 1955 edition of the statutes, article 1 still refers to them as

des jeunes filles ou des veuves qui, voulant faire d'elles-mêmes un don total à Dieu, demandent et obtiennent d'être consacrées par leur Evêque à servir, dans sa dépendance immédiate et absolue, l'apostolat de l'Eglise au milieu du monde.<sup>50</sup>

The use of such a lengthy description, with no mention of any sort of organization, suggests that they had still not found an institutional framework into which they could fit. The next decade saw a shift in this understanding. Two movements were illustrative of this that seemingly converged in 1957. On the one hand, there was a growing awareness for the laity that they too could walk a path to perfection. This led, among other things, to the celebration of the First Day for the Universal Sanctification in 1957, an initiative of the Italian priest Guglielmo Gianquinta and his *Pro Sanctitate* movement. Equally, this universal call to holiness became more and more central in the work of theologians, in Gustave Thils' lengthy *Sainteté chrétienne* for example.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, also on the side of religious life, it became increasingly clear that the state of perfection did not belong to them exclusively. This was also highlighted by Pope Pius XII, who

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<sup>48</sup> Liénart, *La Constitution Provida Mater Ecclesia et les Auxiliaires de l'Apostolat*, s.d. [1947 or later].

<sup>49</sup> Vulhopp, *Note sur la Nature de la Vocation d'Auxiliaire de l'Apostolat*, s.d. [1947 or later].

<sup>50</sup> *Statuts des Auxiliaires de l'Apostolat*, with edits, 1955.

<sup>51</sup> Thils, *Sainteté Chrétienne*.

made it clear that the life of perfection was not reserved only for the religious orders and those who belonged to secular institutes alone, but could be pursued by lay faithful too in his inaugural address to the Congress on the States of Perfection on December 11, 1957:

Nous pensons en ce moment à tant d'hommes et de femmes de toutes conditions, qui assument dans le monde moderne les professions et les charges les plus variées et qui, par amour de Dieu et pour le servir dans le prochain, lui consacrent leur personne et toute leur activité. Ils s'engagent à la pratique des conseils évangéliques par des vœux privés et secrets connus de Dieu seul, et se font guider, pour ce qui regarde la soumission de l'obéissance et la pauvreté, par des personnes, que l'Église a jugées aptes à cette fin et à qui elle a confié la charge de diriger les autres dans l'exercice de la perfection. Aucun des éléments constitutifs de la perfection chrétienne et d'une tendance effective à son acquisition ne fait défaut chez ces hommes et ces femmes. Ils y participent donc vraiment, bien qu'ils ne soient engagés dans aucun état juridique ou canonique de perfection.<sup>52</sup>

#### 4 Vatican II: A Pivotal Point in the Understanding of the Universal Call to Holiness

The difficult path that the *auxiliaires* had taken to define themselves within the structures of the Catholic Church converged in the Second Vatican Council. The approximately 2,500 Council Fathers gathered in Rome included a clear reflection on the nature of the 'People of God', laity, and religious life included in the context of its general reflection on Catholic self-understanding and its relationship to modernity. However, this is not to say that the reflection on women and their possible contribution in this reflection was self-evident. As becomes clear from the historiography of the Second Vatican Council, the conciliar processes' main actors were the Council Fathers and the *periti*, the group of theological experts who assisted the bishops in working out the conciliar schemata. The possible role played by women like the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat*, who were at the crossroads of the laity and religious life, was much more limited; this contributed to a more general conciliar 'silence' on the topic of women.<sup>53</sup> Their direct influence on the council's proceedings should be sought among the lay auditors. This function was created from the second conciliar period onwards so that lay people could also follow the debates,

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<sup>52</sup> Pius XII, "Sous la Maternelle Protection", 36.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Desmazières, "Généalogie d'un 'Silence' Conciliaire".

contributing to the revising of schemata where deemed necessary. However, after the appointment of the first thirteen male lay auditors in 1963, women would only be admitted to the conciliar aula in the council's third period. There were both women religious and women laity among these initial 18 women. Perhaps one of the most famous in the first group was Sister of Loretto Mary Luke Tobin, president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. In the second group was the Australian Rosemary Goldie, who had made a name for herself as secretary to the Permanent Committee for the International Conferences for the Lay Apostolate (COPECIAL).<sup>54</sup> Although the lay auditors did not act as representatives of organizations, but rather operated in a personal capacity, they were mostly associated with the main (umbrella) organizations for the lay apostolate, in particular with those connected to the *Conférence des Organisations Internationales Catholiques* (OIC) or the work of COPECIAL. As such, they often played an important role even prior to the laity's official participation in the council. Many other women would continue to play this indirect role throughout the entire duration, as Regina Heyder and Gisela Muschiol have made clear for the German context in an exemplary way.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, Tilla Vulhopp delivered a speech to the members of the Preparatory Commission on Lay Apostolate in which she explained the who, what, and how of the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat*.<sup>56</sup> This lengthy and detailed speech was necessary because the lay auditor Rosemary Goldie had previously incorrectly described *auxiliaires* as consecrated virgins, which in turn prompted Vulhopp to write a letter to Gerard Philips to have this sentence corrected.<sup>57</sup> Both directly and indirectly, the council's view on the role and the apostolate of (lay) women can be found scattered throughout its documents, mainly in *Lumen Gentium*, *Perfectae Caritatis*, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, and *Gaudium et Spes*.

For the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat*, however, one passage in the final, fifth chapter of *Lumen Gentium* seems to be the key to self-understanding:

Besides these already named, there are also lay faithful, chosen of God and called by the bishop. These lay faithful spend themselves completely in apostolic labours, working the Lord's field with much success. (*Lumen Gentium* 41)

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<sup>54</sup> Minvielle, *L'Apostolat des Laïcs à la Veille du Concile*.

<sup>55</sup> Heyder, Muschiol, *Katholikinnen und das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil*.

<sup>56</sup> Note sur la Forme de 'Vie Apostolique' des Auxiliaires de l'Apostolat, s.d. [1961].

<sup>57</sup> Vulhopp, Letter to Mgr. Philips, 23 March 1961; Vulhopp, *Note pour la commission pour l'Apostolat des Laïcs*, s.d.; Goldie, *Quelques Réflexions au Sujet d'une Vie Consacrée à Dieu 'dans le Monde'*, s.d. [1958 or later].

As its redaction history makes clear, it seems that this passage finally seemed to provide a form of recognition to the lay faithful such as that of the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat*.<sup>58</sup> The passage owed its existence in part to the work of several Belgians, who were all too familiar with this specific calling.<sup>59</sup> The origins of this chapter have to be sought in the context of the broader shift from a juridical to a sacramental understanding of the Church during the Second Vatican Council. This shift occurred during the first period of the Council in 1962 primarily and had led, among others, to the development of a new draft of the schema on the church during the first intersession. The preparatory schema was abandoned and a new schema on the Church in four chapters was being worked out by a subcommittee of the Doctrinal Commission. This so-called subcommittee of 'seven' that included André-Marie Charue, bishop of Namur, eventually opted to work further on a Belgian project that had been established with the contribution of both Philips and Thils. Their choice was accepted at the meeting of the full Doctrinal Commission on March 5. The schema would consist of four chapters, including – as the last chapter – a revision of the preparatory chapter *De statibus perfectionis evangelicae acquirendae*. This work was carried out by a mixed subcommittee comprised of members of both the Doctrinal Commission and the Commission for the Religious between 6-8 March 1963, and resulted in the chapter *De iis qui consilia evangelica profitentur*. As Famerée has also indicated, the schema was thoroughly revised at the instigation of the Belgians.<sup>60</sup> This was inspired by the desire to open up the narrow focus on religious life in order to emphasize the universal call to holiness. Cardinal Suenens, member of the Coordinating Commission, would also call for this in his intervention in this commission on 28 March 1963.<sup>61</sup>

The tension mainly came to the surface during the meeting of the Doctrinal Commission on 27-28 May 1963, to which the Belgians came well prepared: Charue, with the help of Thils, Philips, and Congar, had already initiated the work to write some additional

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<sup>58</sup> It is beyond the scope of this contribution to elaborate a detailed analysis of the redaction of this phrase. Material to conduct such an analysis can be found in the conciliar archives of André-Marie Charue, Gerard Philips, and Gustave Thils: Declerck, *Inventaire des Papiers Conciliaires de Mgr. A.-M. Charue*; Declerck, Verschooten, *Inventaire des Papiers Conciliaires de Monseigneur Gérard Philips*; Soetens, *Concile Vatican II et Église Contemporaine*. Equally insightful in this regard is Famerée's description of Thils' contribution to the redaction of the *De Ecclesia*: Famerée, "Gustave Thils et le De Ecclesia".

<sup>59</sup> On the role of the Belgians at the council, often referred to as the 'squadra belga', see in particular Declerck, *Vatican II*, 1-36.

<sup>60</sup> Famerée, "Gustave Thils et le De Ecclesia", 574.

<sup>61</sup> *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vatican II* (hereafter AS), Vol. V, pars 1, Relatio Cardinal Leon Joseph Suenens, 463-4.

paragraphs that would reflect the universal call to holiness, thereby complementing the specific focus on the religious. However, at Ottaviani's request, the schema could only be revised slightly in the absence of the members of the religious, and only proposals that would not alter the substance of the text could be accepted. In so doing, a decision was taken to revise the text and to put it in a broader context of the universal call to holiness. This task was given to a special subcommittee comprised of Bishops Charue, Marcos McGrath, Ancietus Fernandez, taking Philips, Bernhard Häring, and Marie-Rosaire Gagnebet respectively as their *periti*. A thoroughly reworked schema on the universal call to holiness was the result, relying on the work the Belgians had begun at the beginning of May, called *De vocatione generali ad sanctitatem in Ecclesia*. Included in this text, at Charue's request, were also "des laïcs qui se dévouent totalement à l'œuvre des évêques".<sup>62</sup> The integrated text was approved at the Coordinating Commission meeting of 4 July, as the fifth chapter of the schema on the Church; paragraph 30 referred to God-elected lay faithful that fully commit themselves to apostolic works and are called by the Bishop. In the accompanying footnote, and using an authoritative reference to Pius XII's "Sous la maternelle protection" speech, the fact that although these lay faithful do not hold the canonical status of perfection, they do not lack its constitutive elements was added.<sup>63</sup>

The discussion on this fifth chapter on the general call to holiness in the Church was central to the second period and was debated by the Council between 25-31 October, 1963. Crucially within this discussion – but not resolved by the council at the time – was the question of whether or not one chapter on universal holiness would remain, with the integration of religious life, or if it had to become two separate chapters. Once again, it would be Charue and Philips who would play a significant role in charting the way forward. They were appointed vice-president<sup>64</sup> and joint-secretary of the Doctrinal Commission respectively on 2 December 1963; as such, they would guide this schema through the second intersession. After a preparatory meeting of the subcommittee appointed to oversee this chapter on 3 December 1963, their actual work started on 27 January 1964 and would be closed on 1 February 1964. Preparing this work, Charue had held conversations with Paul Philippe, secretary of the Congregation for the Religious on 23 January, during which he had invoked

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<sup>62</sup> Declerck, Soetens, *Carnets Conciliaires de l'Évêque de Namur A.-M. Charue*, 128.

<sup>63</sup> AS, Vol. II, pars 1, 270: "Missionis autem et gratiae episcopalis articipes sunt inferioris quoque ordinis ministri, immo latiore sensu etiam a Deo electi laici, qui, ut plene se dedant apostolatus operibus, ab Episcopo vocantur".

<sup>64</sup> Charue's appointment would partially be based on his work Charue, *Le Clergé Diocésain*.

the example of the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat* to make the argument that there had always been individuals who had committed themselves to the Church's apostolate, and that it was time to take a step further to recognize them.<sup>65</sup> It is in this same context that a tension arose over the use of examples from apostolic times in order to argue in favor of religious life as a separate statute. While Daniélou would use women saints and the apostles as examples hereof, Charue and Thils would instead emphasize how this related to an individual exercise of holiness. Moreover, as Charue argues:

ce sont des cas de personnes consacrées au service de l'Église et dont on attend une vie sainte, comme nous le disons pour nos prêtres et nos auxiliaires de l'Apostolat.<sup>66</sup>

That the example of the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat* played a role in the redaction may be equally clear from the subsequent discussion on the chapter in the Doctrinal Committee on 13 March 1964, for which Charue noted down:

Le texte sur les 'Auxiliaires' est attaqué par Mgr Doumith, qui ne comprend pas. Mgr Philips répond diplomatiquement qu'il a employé des expressions générales pour recouvrir les divers cas possibles. Cela passe.<sup>67</sup>

As such, a big hurdle was cleared for the passage's integration in the schema on the Church. The larger discussion, on the separation of the chapter into two separate chapters, was once again deferred to the Council Fathers who voted in favor of such a divide on 30 September with an approval of 1,505 *placet*, 698 *non-placet*, and 7 invalid votes. The passage dealing with these specific lay faithful from the former paragraph 30, now paragraph 41, had not undergone much modification.<sup>68</sup> Chapter V itself got a 1,856 *placet*, 17 *non placet*, and 302 *iuxta modum* vote. The Doctrinal Commission's task involved further revision of the chapter along the modi, more specifically of the work by Charue, Šeper, Philips, and Tromp; their work being accepted on 17 November and becoming part of *Lumen Gentium* as promulgated on 21 November 1964.

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<sup>65</sup> Declerck, Soetens, *Carnets Conciliaires de l'Évêque de Namur A.-M. Charue*, 141.

<sup>66</sup> Declerck, Soetens, *Carnets Conciliaires de l'Évêque de Namur A.-M. Charue*, 142.

<sup>67</sup> Declerck, Soetens, *Carnets Conciliaires de l'Évêque de Namur A.-M. Charue*, 173. Three days later, Charue would bring up the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat* during his audience with Pope Paul VI: "Je lui parle des Auxiliaires, qu'on aurait dit rattachées aux Religieux. Il ne sait pas".

<sup>68</sup> AS, Vol. III, pars 1, 296.

Even though chapter five generally had a wide reception, especially in the emerging new ecclesial movements, the specific meaning of the phrase that incorporated the apostolate such as that of the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat* often remained neglected. In his commentary on *Lumen Gentium*, Gerard Philips, who was well-aware of this apostolate and the redaction of this constitution, noted that this chapter on the universal call to holiness was needed to point out that all faithful have access to the fulness of spiritual life, either through the particular practice of the evangelical counsels or not.<sup>69</sup> He pointed out that the constitution added that this is “undertaken by many Christians, either privately or in a Church-approved condition or state of life (LG39)”.<sup>70</sup>

Referring to the phrase included in paragraph 41, concerning the lay faithful who are fully committed to apostolic life, he specified that (I) they are chosen by God (and that this is thus truly an authentic vocation in the Church); (II) they are called by the bishop and are thus taking part in his mission; (III) that it concerns a total personal commitment; (IV) and that they are much like any lay faithful work in the world, but with an explicit apostolic engagement.<sup>71</sup> Recognizing this vocation's uniqueness, and describing it in such terms that it is fitting for the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat*, Philips clarifies that at the time of the Council that this way of life was not yet widely known about, remained in its origins even ‘somewhat out of the public eye’, and was thus viewed with suspicion by some bishops. With its elaboration in *Lumen Gentium*, however, justice was done to at least acknowledge this calling to perfection.

## 5 Conclusions

The implicit recognition of the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat* in *Lumen Gentium* may not be so visible to the outside observer, but it meant a breakthrough in the experienced tensions around one's own and common identity for these and other lay believers. The reference to this experience of identity in the conciliar constitution enabled the transition of this women's vocation from a non-institutionalized belonging to an integration to the core of conciliar doctrine and ecclesiology. The Council seems to be a pivotal point playing out on three levels when it comes to the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat*.

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<sup>69</sup> Philips, *Dogmatische Constitutie over de Kerk Lumen Gentium*, 2: 69.

<sup>70</sup> Philips, *Dogmatische Constitutie over de Kerk Lumen Gentium*, 2: 99-102. It should be noted that while Philips pays attention to the state of life of this particular group of lay people, Labourdette simply omits this phrase in his commentary on the chapter. Labourdette, “La Sainteté”, 1112-15.

<sup>71</sup> Philips, *Dogmatische Constitutie over de Kerk Lumen Gentium*, 2: 99-102.



The first level concerns their position within the Catholic Church. It may be clear how the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat* originated in the archdiocese of Mechelen and, thanks in part to Archbishop Mercier, found a clear embedding there. Thanks to the work of some of these women – Maria Baers, Victoire Cappe, and Tilla Vulhopp have been mentioned in specific in this contribution – this form of apostolate also spread to other dioceses, where it responded to a need among lay faithful to strive towards religious perfection, while still being allowed to live their day-to-day life in the everyday world. However, the upward trajectory of these women in the local church contrasts with their recognition in the universal Church. The difficult path for recognition by the Sacred Congregation of the Council ultimately resulted in a standstill where one's own identity could only be maintained within the framework of the local diocese and by the grace of each individual bishop's understanding of this apostolate, proper or otherwise.

This brings us to the second level, that of the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat's* agency. At the forefront of this is how these women, starting from the first group, shaped this new form of apostolate themselves. In terms of self-definition, they acted on the one hand to make clear *ex negativo* what they were not. As the reference to Vulhopp's intervention towards Philips during the conciliar preparation made clear, they were very straightforward in this regard; equally, and on the other hand, they gave shape to positive self-definition by, among other things, co-writing their own statutes. However, to live that definition to its fullest – especially compared to the situation of the *Amis de Jésus* – was less evident and required more negotiation. In line with other studies on women in Catholicism, the aspect of gender might be an explicatory factor here. Their agency in the experience of the apostolate is a particular issue. As the statutes indicate, they participate in the local bishop's mission and are sent by him to live out the apostolate in their own milieu. At the same time, it is clear how many of these women fulfilled this mission in the (professional) context for which they were trained, were already professionally active prior to becoming an *auxiliaire*, and in which they could make full use of their capacities. The mission allowed them to take agency in society while understanding this as part of a broader path to religious perfection.

Finally, the Second Vatican Council's developments, allowed for the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat* and others to overcome one of the core dichotomies that was being experienced: that between lay apostolate and religious life. While they risked losing *auxiliaires* who were convinced that, as lay people, they could not follow the evangelical counsels and should therefore go for the religious life, especially in the early years, paragraph 41 in *Lumen Gentium's* fifth chapter removed all doubt surrounding this matter. This development had not been evident, even during the council. Ultimately, the elaboration of this chapter and paragraph was the result of the tension that there

would be in the schema on the Church between the chapter on the laity and a chapter on the state of perfection, understood by some as exclusively religious life. The example of the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat*, among others, put forward by Belgian Bishop Charue and theologians like Philips and Thils, pushed to frame this last chapter more broadly as a general call to holiness, eventually being attributed its own, separate chapter. This is an aspiration the *auxiliaires de l'Apostolat* that had been gradually taking shape for years. The Council, thus, offered both a consolidation of their long trajectory, as well as offered them a new beginning:

Given that this time, in the history of the Church, is marked by a revalorization of the lay person in the Church, it seems more essential than ever for the *auxiliaire* to be delivered unreservedly to God's love, in total availability for the salvation of people, that lay world and in the conditions of life of a lay person. She seeks to be ever more faithful to that life of prayer to which she is called, and without which there can be no talk of an apostolic life in the true sense.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> *Verslag 1965-1966*, 10 September 1966. "Vermits deze tijd, in de geschiedenis van de Kerk, gekenmerkt is door een revalorisatie van de leek in de Kerk, lijkt het de medewerkster essentiëler dan ooit, midden in die lekenwereld en in de levensvoorwaarden van een leek, zonder voorbehoud aan Gods liefde geleverd te zijn, in totale beschikbaarheid voor het heil van de mensen. Zij tracht steeds getrouwer te zijn aan dat leven van gebed waartoe ze geroepen is, en zonder hetwelk er geen spraak kan zijn van een apostolisch leven in de ware zin".

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Vulhopp, T. (1931). Letter to Mgr. Van Roey, 14 October.  
Vulhopp, T. (1932). Letter to Maurice Claeys Bouuaert and reply, 28 June.

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*Verslag 1965-1966* (1966), 10 September.

**Diocesan Archives (Namur), Collection *Auxiliaires de l'Apostolat*, Folder *Auxiliaires de l'Apostolat* dans le diocèse, historique, statuts + correspondance**

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*Note Envoyée à Mgr. Heylen* (1929), 15 November.

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**Diocesan Archives (Namur), Collection Q33 Louise Colen**

Picture of Mgr. Mercier, Pierre Harmignie and ca. 30 women with note on the back (1921).

**KU Leuven Centre for the Study of the Second Vatican Council (Leuven), Conciliar Archives of Gerard Philips**

Vulhopp, T. (1961). Letter to Mgr. Philips, 23 March (no. 369).

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**KU Leuven University Archives (Leuven), Archives Albert Dondeyne (1916-2005)**

Box 6.3 Auxiliaires de l'Apostolat/Medewerksters van het Apostolaat.

**National Archives of Belgium (Brussels), Collection Cardijn, Folder 1590 Reflexiedocumenten uitgaande van niet-leden van de Commissie, 1960-1961 en z.d.**

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# Neoconservatives' Reading of Catholic Social Teaching The Political Debate Over the Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*

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**Abstract** Pope John Paul II's 1991 publication of the encyclical *Centesimus Annus* sparked a lively debate that lasted for years. Neoconservative Catholics promptly showed great enthusiasm for the encyclical, which they saw as the Church finally embracing economic liberalism. On the other hand, progressive Catholics rejected the neoconservative analysis and put an entirely different interpretation on the encyclical. This article examines some of the main neocon interpretations of John Paul II's social thinking, primarily focusing on the encyclical *Centesimus Annus*. We consider the analyses of Michael Novak and Richard Neuhaus, who show partisan bias in their interpretation of *Centesimus Annus*. John Paul II's encyclical soon became a battlefield on which the conflict between neoconservative and progressive Catholics was played out, and a landmark in the debate on Catholic social teaching and its various interpretations.

**Keywords** Catholic Social Teaching. John Paul II. Neoconservative Catholics. United States. Michael Novak. Richard Neuhaus.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 The Church, the Market and John Paul II's Social Teaching. – 3 Capitalism, Neoliberalism and *Centesimus Annus*. – 4 God Bless Capitalism: Michael Novak's Reading of *Centesimus Annus*. – 5 The Capitalism of John Paul II According to Richard Neuhaus. – 6 Conclusion.



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## 1 Introduction

In the United States, religious issues have always arisen a heated debate, in Protestant as well as Catholic circles. In the twentieth century, several forms of Protestantism sought to play not only a religious role in American society but also a political and economic one. In particular, the Moral Majority, a conservative Protestant organisation, gradually grew in strength, wielding significant influence on US politics, especially during the Cold War.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, over the years conservative Protestants reached substantial agreement and convergence with Catholic conservatives on a number of key issues.<sup>2</sup> Since the 1950s, their views have been expressed in Neoconservatism, a political movement whose protagonists are from different faith backgrounds, including Protestantism, Catholicism and Judaism.<sup>3</sup> In particular, American neoconservatives made their voice heard in the journals *National Review* and *Modern Age*, founded in 1955 and 1956, respectively. Many contributors to these journals were self-proclaimed Catholic defenders of the capitalist economic system against communism. For example, when Pope John XXIII promulgated the social encyclical *Mater et Magistra* in 1961, *National Review* was critical of its emphasis on the contrast between rich and poor nations rather than on the confrontation between capitalism and communism.<sup>4</sup>

In 1991, Pope John Paul II publishes *Centesimus Annus*, his third social encyclical, following *Laborem Exercens* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. Lively public debate breaks out immediately, and neoconservative interpretations of *Centesimus Annus* swiftly gain ground. The key figures in this debate are Michael Novak, Richard John Neuhaus and George Weigel, prominent representatives of religious neoconservatism in the United States and heirs to the pundits and politicians known as the Cold War Liberals, who had gradually been drifting away from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party since the 1970s.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the neoconservative Catholic movement had been gaining ground in the US since the 1980s and wielded considerable political influence. From the Reagan administration onwards, increasing numbers of American Catholics adopted neoconservative

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas, "The Moral Majority: Background and Current Projects".

<sup>2</sup> Russell, "The Catholic Neoconservative Misreading of John Paul II's *Centesimus Annus* Revisited", 173-5.

<sup>3</sup> Eminent influential Jewish neoconservatives included Daniel Bell, Norman Podhoretz and Irving Kristol. See Del Pero, *Henry Kissinger e l'ascesa dei neoconservatori*, 107-9, and Allitt, "American Catholics and the New Conservatism of the 1950s", 36-7.

<sup>4</sup> Allitt, "American Catholics", 15, 28.

<sup>5</sup> For further information about the development of the neoconservative movement, see Del Pero, "The Historical and Ideological Roots" and Del Pero, *Henry Kissinger*.



positions, exploiting a one-sided interpretation of *Centesimus Annus* to boost support.

The political importance of neoconservative positions also increased after the 1990s, especially during the administrations of George Bush and his son George W. Bush, with a number of politicians close to the neoconservative movement, such as Dick Cheney and Paul Wolfowitz, holding important positions.<sup>6</sup> Under the leadership of Michael Novak, neoconservative Catholics became more powerful over those years, exercising considerable political influence.<sup>7</sup> The neoconservative movement eventually peaked after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, when it strived to formulate an ideological and theoretical framework that justified the 2003 American intervention in Iraq.<sup>8</sup>

Following the publication of *Centesimus Annus*, a heated discussion broke out in the 1990s, involving both secular society and the clergy. A notable example is Robert Alan Sirico, neocon Catholic priest and founder of the Acton Institute, a conservative research and educational institution based in Michigan. He argued that *Centesimus Annus* marked a paradigm shift in the Catholic tradition and a reversal of the left-leaning trend.<sup>9</sup> The debate sparked by the publication of the encyclical quickly became the embodiment of the clash between two politically polarised and irreconcilable forms of Catholicism.<sup>10</sup> Progressive Catholics rejected the neoconservative analysis and put an entirely different interpretation on the encyclical, sparking a cultural and political conflict. Neoconservative Catholics emphasised the sections of *Centesimus Annus* that appear more favourable to capitalism, whereas progressive Catholics made frequent reference to the Pope's criticism of its excesses.

This article offers a historical and political perspective on neoconservative interpretations of John Paul II's social teaching, with a particular focus on the encyclical *Centesimus Annus* and interpretations elaborated by Michael Novak and Richard John Neuhaus.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Dick Cheney served as Secretary of Defense in the H.W. Bush administration and as Vice President in the George W. Bush administration; Paul Wolfowitz served as Under Secretary of Defense in the H.W. Bush administration and as Secretary of Defense in the George W. Bush administration. See Goldstein, "The Contemporary Presidency: Cheney, Vice Presidential Power, and the War on Terror", and High, "The Recent Historiography of American Neoconservatism".

<sup>7</sup> Del Pero, *Henry Kissinger*, 107.

<sup>8</sup> For further information about the development of American Catholicism in the 21st century, see Faggioli, *Joe Biden e il cattolicesimo negli Stati Uniti*.

<sup>9</sup> Sirico, "Catholicism's Developing Social Teaching".

<sup>10</sup> Neoconservative Catholicism has declined over the years but remains significant. For further information, see Borghesi, *Catholic discordance. Neoconservatism vs. the Field Hospital Church of Pope Francis*.

<sup>11</sup> For further information about the development of Catholic social thinking before John Paul II, see Verucci, *La Chiesa nella società contemporanea. Dal primo dopoguere*

While aware of the breadth of the debate and the variety of actors involved, this article attempts to analyse Novak's and Neuhaus's partisan views of John Paul II's social thinking. Neoconservative Catholics saw *Centesimus Annus* as a turning point in the social doctrine of the Church, interpreting it as demonstrating that the Pope had finally expressed a clear preference for a free-market economy, considering private property a fundamental human right. John Paul II was hailed as the capitalist Pope, the first to fully accept and appreciate the American economic system and its successful combination of liberal democracy and economic liberalism.

First, the article explores some novel elements introduced by John Paul II's social encyclicals and investigates the reasons why neoconservative Catholics consider *Centesimus Annus* a turning point in Catholic social thinking. Second, Novak's and Neuhaus's interpretations will be analysed, examining the ways in which *Centesimus Annus* has been adapted to advance neoconservative political and ideological positions. The article draws upon a range of published sources, including John Paul II's social encyclicals and Novak's and Neuhaus's major writings on the Pope's social teaching.

## 2 The Church, the Market and John Paul II's Social Teaching

John Paul II's first social encyclical was *Laborem Exercens*, published in September 1981. It addresses contemporary socio-economic issues and diverges in some ways from previous social encyclicals. John Paul II adopts a mainly spiritual approach, focusing on the theological aspects of what has become known as the "Social Question". *Laborem Exercens* states that "the Church's social teaching finds its source in Sacred Scripture, beginning with the Book of Genesis and especially in the Gospel and the writings of the Apostles".<sup>12</sup> The universal mission of the Church can never disregard its transcendental aspect, and the coming Kingdom of God must be considered the frame of reference for any Catholic reflections. The humanism advocated by John Paul II is thus theocentric rather than anthropocentric in nature: social or economic problems in contemporary society should be addressed using a theological approach. When laying down Catholic social principles, Pope John Paul II focuses on spiritual rather

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ra al Concilio Vaticano II; Vecchio, *La dottrina sociale della Chiesa*; and Himes, Cahill, *Modern Catholic Social Teaching*.

<sup>12</sup> John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 3.

than material matters.<sup>13</sup> Even in the context of the Social Question, the primary and ultimate aim must not be economic and material improvement but the educational and moral development of all people.<sup>14</sup>

*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* is the second social encyclical published by John Paul II, in 1987 on the 20th anniversary of Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio*. First, John Paul II emphasises the need to reaffirm continuity in Catholic social teaching. Second, he underlines the importance of its renewal in line with contemporary societal problems.<sup>15</sup> In *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, the Pope addresses the Social Question from a global perspective, considering socio-economic issues like social justice and the equitable distribution of wealth. In John Paul II's view, the Social Question must be examined from different perspectives: economic, sociological, ecological and moral. The overall goal is the achievement of full human development, reached by spreading solidarity across the globe.

In 1991, Pope John Paul II published his third and last social encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*, in which he reformulates the basic principles of Catholic social teaching. *Centesimus Annus* was published on the centenary of *Rerum Novarum*, Leo XIII's encyclical in which the Social Question and the condition of the working classes are addressed for the first time. *Centesimus Annus* was written as the Soviet Union was collapsing and the Cold War was coming to an end.<sup>16</sup> This was also the era of economic globalisation. John Paul II points out that globalisation "is not to be dismissed, since it can create unusual opportunities for greater prosperity".<sup>17</sup> If channelled towards the common good, the contemporary economic system can foster human development in line with the principles of international cooperation, charity and solidarity.<sup>18</sup>

John Paul II adopts a theological perspective in the encyclical, laying down the moral criteria that must be met in an equitable society. As affirmed by the Pope, *Centesimus Annus* does not aim to design a specific economic system but rather adopts a theological approach to interpret and evaluate contemporary socio-economic models.<sup>19</sup> First,

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<sup>13</sup> For further information about the social teaching of John XXIII and Paul VI and the course of the Second Vatican Council, see, as well as the papal encyclicals, Mello-ni, *Il Concilio e la grazia. Saggi di storia sul Vaticano II*; Alberigo, *Breve storia del Concilio Vaticano II*; Bressan, "Un welfare aperto alla modernità"; Bressan, *Le vie cristiane della sicurezza sociale*.

<sup>14</sup> Toso, *Welfare Society*, 400-1.

<sup>15</sup> Fonseca, "Reflections on the Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*", 6.

<sup>16</sup> Blackman, "Moralizing Neoliberalism? An Analysis of the Principle of Subsidiarity in Catholic Social Teaching", 55.

<sup>17</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 58.

<sup>18</sup> Castellano, *La 'Centesimus Annus' e l'economia di mercato*, 10-11.

<sup>19</sup> For further information about the Church's social doctrine and its theological nature, see Chenu, *La dottrina sociale della Chiesa*; Barucci, Magliulo, *L'insegnamento eco-*

John Paul II focuses on a number of fundamental principles laid down in Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*, which encourages the reader to "look back", to "look around at the new thing" and to "look to the future".<sup>20</sup> *Centesimus Annus* reiterates the importance of solidarity, develops the concept of the common good and emphasises the centrality of the individual. At the same time, the encyclical introduces some novel elements, as it does not remain completely impartial between liberal and socialist ideologies. John Paul II leans strongly towards a free-market economy, which he sees as "the most efficient instrument for utilizing resources and effectively responding to needs".<sup>21</sup>

As highlighted by sociologist Ivo Colozzi, *Centesimus Annus* identifies four spheres in contemporary society. The first is the state, whose role is to ensure the effective functioning of the market economy within a political system based on democracy and the rule of law. The second is the free-market system, which confers on individuals the right to engage in private enterprise and to own private property, and must not be jeopardised by public intervention. The third is civil society, which must develop a spirit of true solidarity and charity, enhancing the formation of private groups and associations to promote a holistic approach to personal development and safeguard human dignity. The fourth is the family, which is defined as the "sanctuary of life" and the "heart of the culture of life"<sup>22</sup>, and is the only system in which true human growth can be developed.<sup>23</sup> John Paul II asserts that the state must never assume the functions of the family or civil society, and must intervene only to ensure that those two spheres are able to perform their tasks unhindered.

Neoconservative thinkers expressed divergent opinions about John Paul II's social encyclicals. *Laborem Exercens* was praised by many. Novak, for instance, acknowledges that John Paul II had taken a positive step forward, differing from his predecessors in recognising the value of many forms of human creativity, including the work of inventors and of management experts. In addition, John Paul II refers to the Social Question in theological rather than pastoral terms. Novak saw these as "giant steps toward the tradition of [...] democratic capitalism".<sup>24</sup> Unlike *Laborem Exercens*, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* was widely criticised by neoconservative thinkers. When it was released,

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*nomico e sociale della Chiesa (1891-1991). I grandi documenti sociali della Chiesa cattolica*; Toso, *Welfare society. La riforma del welfare: l'apporto dei pontefici*; Toso, "Una riforma del sistema finanziario".

<sup>20</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 3; Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, 7.

<sup>21</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 34.

<sup>22</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 39.

<sup>23</sup> Colozzi, "DSC, welfare e politiche sociali", 272-5.

<sup>24</sup> Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, 246-7.

Novak organised a deputation to Rome to protest together with other neocons such as George Weigel, Richard Neuhaus and Peter Berger. They held that *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* failed to acknowledge the benefits and virtues of capitalism.<sup>25</sup> In particular, neocons were irked by the encyclical's condemnation of the evil face of capitalism, such as its assertion that an equitable society has an obligation to remove the 'structures of sin' which often hinder personal development.<sup>26</sup>

After initial disappointment at John Paul II's views, especially after the publication of *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, the neocons took a different line when *Centesimus Annus* was published in 1991.<sup>27</sup> Novak was extremely enthusiastic about the Pope's third social encyclical, applauding his decision to emphasise the virtues and benefits of a free-market economy and arguing that he was finally coming around to the neoconservative point of view.<sup>28</sup> Novak's position was shared by Sirico, who argued that *Centesimus Annus* represented a shift away from the static, zero-sum economic worldview that had made the Catholic Church wary of capitalism.<sup>29</sup>

This section showed how John Paul II's social encyclicals, *Centesimus Annus* in particular, can be read from a theoretical perspective. It also introduced the interpretations given by neocon Catholics on the Pope's social teaching. The next sessions will focus on *Centesimus Annus*' assessment of capitalism. Furthermore, they will examine how the Pope's arguments were interpreted and seized by neoconservative Catholics in the US.

### 3 Capitalism, Neoliberalism and *Centesimus Annus*

In *Centesimus Annus*, John Paul II recognises that the failure of communism left capitalism as the dominant economic system, and provides his assessment of a free-market economy: "If by 'capitalism' is meant an economic system which recognises the fundamental and positive role of business, the market, private property and the resulting responsibilities for the means of production, as well as free human creativity in the economic sector", economic systems of this kind must surely be endorsed. Moreover, not only should capitalism be endorsed but it should also be "proposed to the countries of the

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<sup>25</sup> Duncan, "Tackling Capitalism", 208-9.

<sup>26</sup> John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 36.

<sup>27</sup> For a neoconservative perspective on Catholic social teaching, see Sirico, "The Pope's Warning on the Welfare State" and Sirico, *Catholicism's Developing Social Teaching*.

<sup>28</sup> Duncan, "Tackling Capitalism", 209.

<sup>29</sup> Sirico, "Catholicism's Developing Social Teaching".

Third World which are searching for the path to true economic and civil progress".<sup>30</sup> The Pope points out that the Marxist solution has failed and a free-market economy, with its capacity to innovate, has prevailed and can be recommended to Third World countries striving for social and economic progress. Charity, solidarity, private enterprise and the right to economic initiative are regarded as essential in a democratic society. However, to avoid excesses, some rules must be drawn up by the state "so as to guarantee that the basic needs of the whole of society are satisfied".<sup>31</sup>

The encyclical appears to see the free-market economy and economic globalisation as morally legitimate.<sup>32</sup> Even profit is vindicated: "the Church acknowledges the legitimate *role of profit* as an indication that a business is functioning well. When a firm makes a profit, this means that productive factors have been properly employed and corresponding human needs have been duly satisfied". However, John Paul II points out that the purpose of a business must not simply be to make a profit but is "to be found in its very existence as a *community of persons* who in various ways are endeavoring to satisfy their basic needs, and who form a particular group at the service of the whole of society".<sup>33</sup>

In addition, *Centesimus Annus* sees modern welfare states as often expensive, bureaucratic and inefficient. John Paul II emphasises the effectiveness of a free-market economy, which he sees as "the most efficient instrument for utilizing resources and effectively responding to needs". However, there are some human needs that the market cannot meet so "it is also necessary to help [...] needy people to acquire expertise, to enter the circle of exchange, and to develop their skills in order to make the best use of their capacities and resources".<sup>34</sup> Put simply, each individual must be provided with the means to participate in a free-market system. The fundamental principle of subsidiarity must be applied to ensure the smooth functioning of the economy, and particularly to counter any totalitarian aspirations that a state might harbour. While *Centesimus Annus* levels harsh criticism at the welfare state, emphasises the principle of subsidiarity and supports a free-market economy, it also condemns excessive consumerism, harshly criticising the moral decline of contemporary society and promoting the importance of true spiritual development.

In the encyclical, John Paul II stresses the importance of the work ethic, noting that work also allows individuals to grow spiritually. The Pope asserts that all countries in the world must be able to ac-

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<sup>30</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 42.

<sup>31</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 35.

<sup>32</sup> McCann, "Catholic Social Teaching", 68.

<sup>33</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 35.

<sup>34</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 34.

quire human-resources expertise to fully benefit from the advantages of a capitalist economy. John Paul II promotes a form of personal development that is primarily qualitative rather than merely quantitative. Morality and the economy are distinct concepts but they are not conflicting or disconnected. The economy is a man-made system in which human beings are able to exercise freedom.<sup>35</sup> In summary, John Paul II's positive view of contemporary business models comes with an emphasis on religious and moral aspects of the economy. *Centesimus Annus* focuses on the theological and Christological aspects of Catholic social teaching, emphasising the importance of moral development.<sup>36</sup> John Paul II sustains that all work must become knowledge work, thereby allowing people to develop in educational, spiritual and moral ways. Socio-economic issues are seen as linked to a theological account of human nature, based on the biblical narratives of creation and the likeness between people and God.<sup>37</sup> In *Centesimus Annus*, John Paul II extols the Christian virtues fostered by successful businesses, affirming the value of a free-market economy in which economic freedom can be exercised. Private enterprise and the involvement of Christians in business are encouraged so that Catholics are able to "cultivate a specific set of intellectual and moral habits that make their own distinctive contribution to the common good".<sup>38</sup>

Another significant innovation in the encyclical concerns the Pope's evaluation of political systems. Unlike previous encyclicals, *Centesimus Annus* explicitly praises democracy, which is "possible only in a State ruled by law, and on the basis of a correct conception of the human person".<sup>39</sup> John Paul II displays a willingness to accept a modern, democratic and liberal society together with its economic, political and cultural values.<sup>40</sup> He also expresses his opposition to direct public intervention in the economic system. However, some points remain unclear. The Pope stresses the need for some limitations to be imposed on a free-market economy.<sup>41</sup> However, the nature of such limitations is not specified clearly. If they are regarded simply as rules which must be followed to ensure the correct functioning of capitalism, John Paul II's position is compatible with liberal thinking. If however such limitations are interpreted as state prohibitions that hinder free-market mechanisms, *Centesimus Annus* cannot be considered to be fully compatible with capitalism.

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<sup>35</sup> Castellano, *La 'Centesimus Annus'*, 163-5.

<sup>36</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 49.

<sup>37</sup> McCann, "Catholic Social Teaching", 65.

<sup>38</sup> McCann, "Catholic Social Teaching", 66-7.

<sup>39</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 46.

<sup>40</sup> Rhonheimer, *The Common Good*, 490-3.

<sup>41</sup> Beyer, "Strange Bedfellows: Religious Liberty and Neoliberalism".

#### 4 **God Bless Capitalism: Michael Novak's Reading of *Centesimus Annus***

Michael Novak, who passed away in 2017 at the age of 83, was one of the most fervent supporters of an alliance between the Catholic Church and democratic capitalism.<sup>42</sup> As a member of the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank where he held a teaching position, Novak devoted much effort over the years to demonstrating that Catholic doctrine and a free-market economy were compatible.<sup>43</sup> Before becoming a firm advocate of neoconservative ideology, in the 1960s Novak had been a member of the far left. He had argued for the rise of a progressive Catholic Church, advocating a religiously inspired revolution in consciousness leading to greater individual freedom. Novak gradually abandoned his progressive ideas, increasingly defending neoliberalism and arguing for its reconciliation with Catholicism.<sup>44</sup> Over the years, Novak became a fully-fledged theologian of American democratic capitalism, arguing that Catholicism and capitalism shared a common sense of solidarity and *caritas*.<sup>45</sup>

During and after John Paul II's papacy, Novak analysed several encyclicals and other writings to demonstrate the link between the Catholic ethic on the one hand and liberalism and capitalism on the other. Novak encouraged the development of a theology of commerce and industry in which the Church acknowledges all the enormous benefits of democratic capitalism. To this end, he frequently questioned statements in which John Paul II was less favourable to neoconservative ideas, such as in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. However, Novak and other American neoconservatives adopted a different approach when *Centesimus Annus* was published. In Novak's view, democratic capitalism now appeared to be explicitly acknowledged as a system that was fully compatible with Catholic doctrine. Furthermore, capitalism had become the model to be recommended to Third World countries searching for the path to true economic and civil progress.<sup>46</sup> By conveniently disregarding the parts of the encyclical in which the excesses of capitalism are condemned, Novak's analysis of *Centesimus Annus* allowed him to conclude that Catholic principles and capitalism are fully compatible, as suggested by the title of the book in which he promotes this idea: *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

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<sup>42</sup> For a broad and enthusiastic overview of Novak's thinking, see Felice, *Capitalismo e Cristianesimo. Il personalismo economico di Michael Novak*.

<sup>43</sup> McGreevy, "Catholics, Democrats and the GOP", 675.

<sup>44</sup> Linker, *The Theocons*.

<sup>45</sup> Antiseri, "Michael Novak", 164-6.

<sup>46</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 42.



Novak devotes several chapters of the book to analysing the Catholic social doctrine that had developed over the years before the papacy of John Paul II. In particular, he examines the Church's criticisms of the free market from Leo XIII onwards. According to Novak, *Centesimus Annus* finally opened up the possibility of recognising the ethical nature of capitalism. Referring to Christian anthropology, John Paul II emphasises the principle of the subjectivity of individuals and society, which is expressed through "disciplined and creative *human work* and, as an essential part of that work, *initiative and entrepreneurial ability*".<sup>47</sup>

Before commenting on John Paul II's social teaching, Novak investigates the origins of the Church's disparaging view of liberalism and capitalism. He refers to the thesis advanced by the Italian Catholic politician Amintore Fanfani, who saw Catholicism and capitalism as incompatible. Fanfani held that capitalism places great value on wealth and profit as the most effective means of achieving complete individual satisfaction but neglects other human needs. What particularly distresses Novak, however, is Fanfani's claim that capitalism is compatible with Protestantism but not with Catholicism.<sup>48</sup> Novak strongly rejects this hypothesis, emphasising instead the positive aspects of capitalism, such as volunteering, philanthropy, solidarity and charity. In Novak's view, capitalism promotes the individual initiative and creativity that stem from a deep sense of social responsibility. He is therefore extremely critical of welfare-state systems for depriving people of individual responsibility by assuming the functions and socio-economic activities that should be the responsibility of civil society. Unlike welfare-state systems, which encourage dependence and passivity, capitalism produces vast economic wealth that allows non-profit organisations of volunteers to be set up.<sup>49</sup>

Having analysed 20th-century Catholic thinking on capitalism and liberalism, Novak turns to the papacy of John Paul II. First, he reaffirms that democratic capitalism promotes the creation of institutions and associations that foster human creativity. Second, Novak argues that capitalism also safeguards economic freedom, a fundamental aspect of a democratic society. Novak notes that the Pope emphasises these features in *Centesimus Annus*: religious and economic freedom are linked, and must be guaranteed to ensure the full deployment of individual subjectivity.<sup>50</sup> Novak is very enthusiastic about *Centesimus Annus*, stating that "we are all capitalists now,

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<sup>47</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 32.

<sup>48</sup> Novak, *The Catholic Ethic*, 23-6.

<sup>49</sup> Novak, *The Catholic Ethic*, 35-6.

<sup>50</sup> Novak, *The Catholic Ethic*, 95-8.

even the Pope".<sup>51</sup> Novak interprets the encyclical as clear evidence of the Pope's desire to bridge the gap between theology and economics. Religious and economic liberty are connected in that they are the highest expression of the individual's freedom of choice, which must never be constrained by state intervention.<sup>52</sup>

Novak also notes John Paul II's reflections on civil society. The Pope explicitly criticises excessive state intervention, favouring the creation of private associations as icons of democracy that are in line with Catholic social principles. *Centesimus Annus* recognises the valuable social function of market forces and private enterprise. Novak also addresses the Pope's criticism of idolatry of the market, claiming that such excesses are limited to libertarianism, a fringe form of capitalism. Novak thus draws a clear distinction between capitalism and libertarianism, and ascribes all the flaws identified by the Pope to the latter. This allows him to claim that the neocon interpretation of democratic capitalism is fully accepted by the Church.<sup>53</sup>

Novak holds that individual morality and collective responsibility, the key values of democratic capitalism, are more than sufficient to help the poor and the disadvantaged. State intervention must be reduced drastically, and capitalism must be fostered worldwide in order to eradicate poverty. He sees the main cause of global poverty as the limitation of individual economic creativity resulting from state intervention in low-income countries. His solution is not the redistribution of wealth and income but the spread of democratic capitalism, which he considers a panacea for reducing socio-economic disparity. The disadvantaged should not be helped directly by the state through subsidies or redistribution mechanisms, but must only be given the opportunity to develop their full potential through the free exercise of economic activity.<sup>54</sup> In short, Novak argues that the poor are poor because they have not yet appreciated the potential of capitalism, and that a capitalist system would let them achieve their full potential and improve their economic circumstances.

In the final part of his book, Novak also briefly addresses how progressive thinkers reacted to *Centesimus Annus*. Over the years, progressive journalists and thinkers had launched bitter attacks on the neoconservative analysis, offering an entirely different interpretation of John Paul II's encyclical and making frequent reference to the Pope's criticism of the excesses of capitalism and economic glo-

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<sup>51</sup> Novak, *The Catholic Ethic*, 101.

<sup>52</sup> Novak, "Truth and Liberty: the Present Crisis in Our Culture", 8-10.

<sup>53</sup> Novak, *The Catholic Ethic*, 144-5.

<sup>54</sup> Novak, *The Catholic Ethic*, 152.

balisation.<sup>55</sup> Differently from the neoconservative standing, the progressive position places much greater weight on the parts of *Centesimus Annus* that are in line with previous social encyclicals.<sup>56</sup> Novak claims that the Catholic left had been embarrassed by the publication of the encyclical, and had therefore focused on the parts where John Paul II values the role of the state.<sup>57</sup> Rejecting leftist views, Novak again extols capitalism, regarding it as the most effective system for promoting human creativity and private enterprise. He criticises progressive Catholics for erroneously treating the disadvantaged as vulnerable and passive individuals who need state intervention to get out of poverty. In contrast, neoconservatives are aware of each individual's potential, seeing the poor as capable, creative and dynamic.

Over the years, the views promoted by Novak and the neocons have been vigorously opposed by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, which in 1986 promulgated the pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All*. The pastoral letter counters libertarian arguments by pointing out the importance of socio-economic justice and distributism.<sup>58</sup> The polemics continued into the 1990s. After the release of *Centesimus Annus*, John Carr, director of the Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, firmly opposed neocon interpretations, highlighting John Paul II's statements in support of social justice.<sup>59</sup> Neocon pundits argued that John Paul II's encyclical challenges the validity of the 1986 pastoral letter, but Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland, who presided over the drafting of the pastoral, asserted that the Pope's firm view is that capitalism must be controlled and limited.<sup>60</sup> The main opponents of the neocon position accused them of having desperately tried to find legitimacy for their thinking in papal encyclicals, and in particular in John Paul II's *Centesimus Annus*.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Sniegocki, "The Social Ethics of Pope John Paul II", 7-10; Steinfels, "Papal Encyclical Urges Capitalism to Shed Injustices"; Storck, "What Does *Centesimus Annus* Really Teach?"

<sup>56</sup> Higgins, "The Pope and the Free Market"; Rogaly, "Business; Ex Cathedra"; Sethi, Steidlmeier, "Religions's Moral Compass".

<sup>57</sup> Novak, *The Catholic Ethic*, 148.

<sup>58</sup> United States Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*.

<sup>59</sup> Steinfels, "Ideas & Trends; Rome's 100-Year Hunt For a Middle Ground".

<sup>60</sup> Steinfels, "Papal Encyclical".

<sup>61</sup> Brunelli, "Tra ideologia teocon e 'ospedale da campo'".

## 5      **The Capitalism of John Paul II According to Richard Neuhaus**

The papacy of John Paul II had gained the approval of American neo-conservatives like Michael Novak, who showed particular appreciation for *Centesimus Annus*. Novak was just one among many neocons who celebrated the encyclical, arguing that the Catholic Church had finally approved democratic capitalism. This section focuses on the interpretation provided by the theocon Richard John Neuhaus, who played a major role in legitimising the view of John Paul II as the capitalist Pope.

Neuhaus, a Catholic priest and writer, was the son of a Lutheran pastor. He was born in Canada but later moved to the United States and became a US citizen. His biography resembles Novak's. As a young man, Neuhaus was a liberal activist and a keen participant in progressive activities. He took part in leftist political agitation inspired by religious ideals like social justice and freedom. In the 1960s, Neuhaus joined the civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements. He was a firm supporter of the protests organised by Martin Luther King Jr. and was involved in clashes with police at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago.<sup>62</sup> He was also active in Clergy and Laity Concerned About Vietnam, an anti-war organisation with a religious orientation whose aim was to shed light on the injustices of American actions in Vietnam. However, some years later Neuhaus began to decry such activities, turning instead to neoconservative positions, combating the spread of secularism and opposing abortion, euthanasia and same-sex marriage.<sup>63</sup> He also began to argue for the expansion of public religiosity and for theological and political conservatism.<sup>64</sup> In the 1990s, Neuhaus converted to Catholicism and entered the priesthood. He became an influential member of the Acton Institute and the most prominent conservative Roman Catholic in America, sharing the views of other prominent figures such as Michael Novak, Peter Berger and George Weigel.<sup>65</sup> In the 2000s, Neuhaus also had a significant influence on George W. Bush, who sought his counsel before and during his presidency. When Neuhaus died in 2009, Bush expressed his sadness: "Father Neuhaus was an inspirational leader, admired theologian, and accomplished author

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<sup>62</sup> Linker, *The Theocons*.

<sup>63</sup> Boyagoda, *Richard John Neuhaus*.

<sup>64</sup> Linker, *The Theocons*.

<sup>65</sup> Peter Berger is one of the most influential theorists of neoconservatism like Irving Kristol, Norman Podhoretz and Michael Novak. The neoconservative Catholic George Weigel is also a biographer of John Paul II and author of the bestseller *Witness to Hope*. For other in-depth analyses of John Paul II's biography and papacy, see Ricciardi, *Giovanni Paolo II*, and Miccoli, *In difesa della fede. La chiesa di Giovanni Paolo II e Benedetto XVI*.

who devoted his life to the service of the Almighty and to the betterment of our world. He was also a dear friend, and I have treasured his wise counsel and guidance".<sup>66</sup>

Neuhaus shared Novak's views and began contesting long-standing Catholic criticism of neoliberalism and expressing great enthusiasm for *Centesimus Annus*. In his book *Doing Well and Doing Good: The Challenge to the Christian Capitalist*, Neuhaus even claims that the encyclical is an endorsement of Novak's concept of democratic capitalism. According to Neuhaus, as Novak's writings were read widely in Poland, they had had a significant influence on Karol Wojtyła and shaped his later arguments in favour of capitalism.<sup>67</sup>

In *Doing Well and Doing Good*, Neuhaus endeavours to reconcile Catholicism, democracy and capitalism by referring to John Paul II's thinking and in particular to *Centesimus Annus*, which aims to "propose a 're-reading' of Pope Leo's Encyclical".<sup>68</sup> In Neuhaus's view, the greatest innovation introduced by John Paul II is the distinction between primitive capitalism and new capitalism. The former, which is in line with Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, is criticised and rejected, whereas the latter, which implies the development of a free-market economy, is endorsed and welcomed. Neuhaus argues that, in the wake of the 1989 revolutions, a new era characterised by the spread of democratic capitalism had finally arrived, and sees the publication of *Centesimus Annus* as a tangible sign of this change.<sup>69</sup>

In *Doing Well and Doing Good*, Neuhaus reaffirms the concept of the subjectivity of society defined in *Centesimus Annus*, in opposition to public intervention.<sup>70</sup> He also notes the Pope's harsh criticism of all forms of socialism. While recognising that there are still Catholics who adhere to socialist principles, John Paul II considers socialism irremediably wrong.<sup>71</sup> Neuhaus recognises that socialism has often been regarded as an alternative to radical forms of capitalism. However, he rejects the socialist option and asserts that democratic capitalism does not entail submission to the market or idolatry of it, drawing a clear distinction between neoconservatism and radical libertarianism. Neuhaus recognises that the Pope rightly warns against radical forms of capitalism that lead to unbridled consumerism, which he condemns as totally immoral. He asserts, however, that democratic capitalism is fully accepted and endorsed by John Paul II, where-

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<sup>66</sup> The White House, *President Bush Saddened by Death of Father Richard John Neuhaus*.

<sup>67</sup> Duncan, "Tackling Capitalism", 210.

<sup>68</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 3.

<sup>69</sup> Neuhaus, *Doing Well*, 69-70; Neuhaus, "The Pope Affirms the 'New Capitalism'".

<sup>70</sup> Neuhaus, *Doing Well*, 29-30.

<sup>71</sup> Neuhaus, *Doing Well*, 42-3.

as all forms of socialism are rejected.<sup>72</sup> Neuhaus holds that John Paul II undeniably regards socialism as fundamentally wrong, including in anthropological terms, and supports capitalism. By laying down the principle of the subjectivity of society, the Pope explicitly opposes state socialism, where the individual is nothing more than an element within the social organism. John Paul II challenges this view, emphasising how important it is for an individual to have something “he can call ‘his own’” and to “have the possibility of earning a living through his own initiative”.<sup>73</sup> In contrast, what the encyclical refers to as the “Social Assistance State” encourages passivity and dependence, stripping individuals of responsibility. When the state adopts social policies aimed at helping the poor, it creates an incentive to stay poor.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, Neuhaus opposes any form of wealth redistribution, arguing that the poor must be admitted into the economic system and become part of the circle of exchange that creates wealth.<sup>75</sup>

While admitting that capitalism does not always benefit everyone, Neuhaus argues that negative outcomes of this kind are a consequence of the economic system not yet being free enough. He reiterates his argument that the solution is not to redistribute wealth but to offer everyone the possibility of becoming part of the virtuous circle of democratic capitalism. In his view, this is exactly what *Centesimus Annus* recommends when it advocates a free-market economy based on the principle of solidarity.<sup>76</sup> To build a free-market economy, individuals must be able to form associations and organisations freely. All individuals must have the right to engage in unfettered enterprise and engagement in economic activity that can increase their productivity, fulfil their aspirations and allow them into the system of democratic capitalism. Capitalism is seen as the best economic framework in which Christian principles of solidarity and freedom can apply.<sup>77</sup> Echoing John Paul II's encyclical, Neuhaus argues that disadvantaged people must be helped “to acquire expertise, to enter the circle of exchange, and to develop their skills in order to make the best use of their capacities and resources”.<sup>78</sup> He states that overthinking real or alleged inequalities caused by Western actions in developing countries is futile. Refuting complaints about Western imperialism and neocolonialism, Neuhaus asserts that poor nations

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<sup>72</sup> Neuhaus, “Democracy – A Christian Imperative”.

<sup>73</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 13.

<sup>74</sup> Neuhaus, *Doing Well*, 151-2.

<sup>75</sup> Neuhaus, *Doing Well*, 156-7.

<sup>76</sup> Neuhaus, *Doing Well*, 175-6; Neuhaus, “The Liberalism of John Paul II”.

<sup>77</sup> For an in-depth account of how Neuhaus sees the relationship between democracy and capitalism, see Neuhaus, “Democracy – A Christian Imperative”.

<sup>78</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 34.

have failed to assume their responsibilities properly, and interprets *Centesimus Annus* as emphasising this.

Neuhaus also addresses the arguments of progressive pundits who cite *Centesimus Annus* when advocating radical social change to achieve greater socio-economic and environmental justice across the world. Neuhaus asserts that the only part of *Centesimus Annus* in which the Pope refers to such issues can be ignored, even arguing that the few sentences that address lifestyle choices or environmental issues sound like throwaway comments. Neuhaus denounces progressive Catholics who reject the interpretation of the encyclical as full approval of democratic capitalism. He holds that the disappointment of progressive Catholics in the encyclical led them to interpret it incorrectly. He refers explicitly to the Center of Concern think tank based in Washington DC, which in his opinion manipulated the encyclical to discredit neoconservative interpretations.<sup>79</sup> To bolster the validity of his own interpretation, Neuhaus notes that in *Centesimus Annus* the Pope refers to his previous encyclicals as well as to Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*, in which the right to private property and individual freedom are emphasised. In fact, John Paul II focuses less on the more progressive social documents produced by John XXIII and Paul VI – *Mater et Magistra*, *Pacem in Terris* and *Populorum Progressio* – which are only mentioned only seven times in total.<sup>80</sup>

In conclusion, Neuhaus concurs with Novak that *Centesimus Annus* should be seen as the encyclical of democratic capitalism. He claims that John Paul II's encyclical is the clearest sign of the Catholic Church's innovative shift towards a position in which the right to private property and free economic enterprise are asserted once and for all.

## 6 Conclusion

In 1991, John Paul II publishes the encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, which provokes lively discussion in American Catholicism. In particular, neoconservative Catholics warmly applaud John Paul II's third social encyclical, focusing on the Pope's endorsement of free-market systems.

The encyclical firmly asserts the principle of subsidiarity, supports private enterprise and promotes economic freedom. It severely criticises Western welfare-state models, condemning their shortcomings and excesses. This led to *Centesimus Annus* being hailed as a great step forward by neoconservative Catholics, who interpreted the encyclical as signalling that the Church had finally accepted and em-

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<sup>79</sup> Neuhaus, *Doing Well*, 224.

<sup>80</sup> Neuhaus, *Doing Well*, 137-8.

braced economic liberalism. Going beyond Catholic rhetoric on a third way, namely, an alternative to both socialism and capitalism, John Paul II highlights the benefits of a market economy that safeguards economic freedom and private enterprise, and advocates a subsidiary role for central authority. Governments should abandon economic planning in favour of creating ideal conditions for citizens to exercise their right to engage in private enterprise and enjoy economic freedom.<sup>81</sup>

However, *Centesimus Annus* also notes some limitations of the market, pointing out that some collective and qualitative needs cannot be met by market mechanisms. The alleged ambiguity of some of the sentences in the encyclical has, from the outset, led to clashes between neoconservative and progressive Catholics, each side citing sections that can be read as supporting their own convictions. In particular, the Catholic neocons Novak and Neuhaus were attacked for promoting a biased interpretation of *Centesimus Annus*, glibly dismissing the Pope's criticisms of capitalism and its shortcomings. In their analysis of John Paul II's social teaching, Novak and Neuhaus were ambivalent about the social encyclical *Laborem Exercens* and criticised *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* severely, seeing them as too critical of capitalism. In contrast, they expressed wholehearted appreciation of *Centesimus Annus*, which they regard as an endorsement of the alliance between Catholicism and capitalism. In their books, Novak and Neuhaus emphasise the statements made by the Pope in which he is critical of state intervention in the economy, highlighting his declarations in favour of private enterprise. Convinced that the Church has finally embraced capitalism, neoconservative Catholics have widely criticised alternative interpretations of the encyclical. In their view, progressive Catholics were disappointed by *Centesimus Annus* and elaborated a misleading interpretation of the encyclical to further their own interests.

In summary, this article lays out the main arguments advanced by American Catholic neocons on the relationship between Catholic social teaching and a free-market economy. In particular, it focuses on some of the main views expressed by American neocons on John Paul II's papacy and his most controversial social encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*, which was open to different interpretations. Intense debate broke out as soon as it was published, raising the issue of whether capitalism was compatible with Catholic social teaching. There is no doubt that the publication of *Centesimus Annus* was a significant political milestone, becoming the subject of lively debate and leading to a growing rift between progressive and neoconservative Catholics.

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<sup>81</sup> Beyond neoconservative interpretations, the relationship between economic issues and the social doctrine of the Church is being explored even today. See Annett, *Catholicism: How Catholic Tradition Can Create a More Just Economy*.



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# Journey to Pragmatism: The History of the American Religious Right in the Nineties

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**Abstract** The article analyses the political history of the American Religious Right in the nineties. It will be argued that conservative Christian political organizations achieved greater influence on partisan and national agenda by undergoing a pragmatic turn in structure, rhetoric and strategies. The uncompromising behavior of the eighties gave way to a gradual approach with a give-and-take logic. The article will pay attention to abortion as perhaps the most pressing issue at the time among conservative Christians. For its analysis the article relies on contributions published on *Christianity Today*, the flagship magazine of American Evangelicalism.

**Keywords** Politics. Religious Right. USA. Evangelicals. Abortion. Nineties. Conservatism. Conservative Christians.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Previous Forms of Political Engagement. – 3 A Changing Decade. – 4 Conclusions.



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## 1 Introduction

Evangelical Christians are considered a stable presence on the American political scene nowadays.<sup>1</sup> Their religious and political positions are well known, characterized first and foremost by the advancement of a social conservative agenda concerned with a pro-life position and the defense of the traditional family. As a constituency, they have overwhelmingly voted Republican in all elections since the Reagan era, to the point that Evangelicals have moved to form the core electorate of the party. Recent electoral results have confirmed the strong association between the Evangelical and social conservative Republican identities.<sup>2</sup> The political prominence of Evangelical groups is the result of a long and difficult history that brought what had once been a movement largely unconcerned with politics to the forefront of the American scene. Furthermore, the so-called Religious Right has matured from a simple electorate to an active force steering the Republican and national agenda towards the achievement of its goals.<sup>3</sup>

The aim of this article is to explore this process as a *Journey to Pragmatism* that the Religious Right underwent by changing its nature to better suit the realm of politics, without losing sight of its major social and political ambitions. Those changes in structure and strategy that allowed conservative Christian groups to transition from an electoral constituency into a more effective political bloc will be described.<sup>4</sup> It will be argued that conservative Christians signifi-

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<sup>1</sup> On the rise of Evangelicals, see Carpenter, “Fundamentalist Institutions”; Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism*; On Evangelical theology, Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*; Collins, *The Evangelical Moment*; On the Evangelical phenomenon and its outreach, Stanley, *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism*.

<sup>2</sup> At the time of writing, the most recent U.S. election was the Presidential election of 2020. In this election, white Evangelicals voted between 76% and 81% for the Republican party, depending on the definition of Evangelical implemented. Newport, “Religious Group Voting and the 2020 Election”.

<sup>3</sup> The Religious Right is the comprehensive label given to all the conservative Christian groups that actively work and lobby to influence the political process in order to push an agenda marked by conservative Christian values, principles and policies. Formed by a core of Evangelical Protestants and Catholics alongside a smaller cohort of mainline Protestants and Mormons, these groups are characterized by their differing views on confession and do not necessarily collaborate one with the other. Despite these discrepancies, they do share a homogeneous political position strongly anchored in common social conservative agreements. For the purpose of this article, the terms Religious Right, conservative Christians, and Evangelicals will be used interchangeably to indicate these groups as a coherent conservative political constituency. For a detailed study on the politicization of Evangelicals and the Religious Right, see Harp, *Protestants and American Conservatism*; Martin, *With God on Our Side*; Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America*; Durham, *The Christian Right*.

<sup>4</sup> While this article focuses exclusively on the evolution of the Religious Right in the nineties, a wider and more comprehensive history can be found in Williams, *God’s Own Party*.

cantly changed their behavior by adopting a new approach to politics built on give-and-take logic and acceptance of gradualism as a legitimate strategy, which follows from the idea that gradual but steady victories yield more results than landmark decisions.

The nineties, in particular, represent a pivotal point in this process. As twelve years of Republican administration came to an end with the election of Bill Clinton (born 1946), the political fate of the Religious Right was uncertain, hovering between retreat, continuity and change.<sup>5</sup> The forces pushing for change eventually prevailed and brought novelties that would persist even under the sympathetic administration of George W. Bush (born 1946). To understand the political evolution of the Religious Right, this article will take into consideration perhaps its most emotional policy issue at the time, namely abortion. Evangelicals found it necessary to rethink the nature and strategy of their political organizations in order to achieve considerable legislative goals, especially regarding abortion, as the uncompromising attitude of the eighties had largely failed.

This research mainly relies on contributions published in *Christianity Today*, the flagship magazine of American Evangelicalism.<sup>6</sup> *Christianity Today* aims to be a comprehensive forum for the entire Evangelical world, offering a space for contributions from the Religious Right to the Religious Left. Furthermore, it has not been affiliated with any political organization during these years, but rather avoided direct political activism and identification. Still, contextualized in the broader world of American Evangelicalism of the nineties and early two-thousands, it can be assumed that *Christianity Today* held a moderately conservative point of view, and thus supported the arguments for social conservatism without adhering wholeheartedly to the projects and statements made by influential conservative Christian leaders.

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<sup>5</sup> I am referring to the Reagan-Bush (Sr.) Era, which started with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1981 and ended with the first term of George H.W. Bush in 1993.

<sup>6</sup> All media products of *Christianity Today*, spanning from the printed magazine to digital articles, from sponsored literature to podcasts, reach about 2.5 million readers monthly. Information on magazine circulation was found in Moyler, "Christianity Today Subscriptions Rose"; and on the websites of the Evangelical Press Association and Christianity Today, respectively <https://www.evangelicalpress.com/cti/> and <https://www.Christianitytoday.org/what-we-do/>. It should be noted that the numbers displayed by the sources are vastly different, as some take into account the circulation of the printed magazine alone, while others consider the total number of media products aimed at ministry in its widest definition. Hence, they might range from a monthly print circulation of 120,000 to 2.5 million for media resources and 4.5 million Christian leaders reached through media ministries.

## 2 Previous Forms of Political Engagement

At the time of the Supreme Court decision in *Roe vs. Wade*, Evangelical opinions on abortion had been mixed, if not lenient.<sup>7</sup> As the Catholic Church was the strongest voice in the early pro-life camp,<sup>8</sup> Evangelicals largely refrained from joining the debate due to anti-Catholic biases inherited from their Fundamentalist past. Furthermore, many Evangelicals actually agreed with the ruling because it aligned with their stance against government interference on individual decisions. Even the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Evangelical tradition among Americans and a later major player in the pro-life camp, initially endorsed abortion under certain circumstances.<sup>9</sup> Only in the seventies would the Evangelical position drastically change, following and in part contributing to a period of unprecedented political activism.

The historical roots of the Religious Right are still the subject of academic debate, and the thesis of a conservative reaction against progressive policies still enjoys widespread consensus.<sup>10</sup> Timid collaborations between social conservative Catholic and Protestant leaders can already be found in the mid-sixties as a response to the sexual revolution.<sup>11</sup> These first experiences would not blossom into a more comprehensive and organized effort until the late seventies. Evangelical leaders felt compelled to act due to the perceived threat to the American family posed by progressive movements and policies concerning feminism, abortion and homosexual rights.<sup>12</sup> However, recent studies have put forth a different interpretation, whereby

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<sup>7</sup> On January 22, 1973, the Supreme Court ruled (7-2) that unduly restrictive state regulations on abortion were unconstitutional, since they violated the woman's constitutional right to privacy granted by the fourteenth amendment. Konway, Butler, "State Abortion Legislation".

<sup>8</sup> The US Catholic Church had actively engaged in the abortion debate since the sixties. The National Right to Life Committee, the first national anti-abortion organization in the US, was created by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1968. After *Roe v. Wade*, the organization was incorporated in order to campaign more effectively against abortion policies. Lay Catholics tend to be divided on the issue of abortion, the Church and its advocacy bodies unanimously oppose the practice according to the natural law paradigm. A compendium of the most relevant developments regarding the US Catholic Church as an actor in the pro-life camp can be found in Karrer, "The National Right to Life Committee"; Greenhouse, Siegel, *Before Roe v. Wade*. On the position of US Catholics on abortion: Fahmy, "8 key findings about Catholics and abortion".

<sup>9</sup> Griffith, *Moral Combat*, 202-3; Balmer, *Evangelicalism in America*, 110.

<sup>10</sup> Gifford, Williams (eds), *The Right Side of the Sixties*; Williams, *God's Own Party*, 105-86; Durham, *The Christian Right*, 10-11.

<sup>11</sup> Gifford, Williams (eds), *The Right Side of the Sixties*. The authors highlight the experiences of influential leaders at the time, such as Timothy LaHaye (1926-2016) and Billy James Hargis (1925-2004).

<sup>12</sup> Williams, *God's Own Party*; Dowland, "Family Values".



the defense of racial segregation within Evangelical educational institutions, as well as their tax-exempt status, served as the motivating factors behind the involvement of Evangelical leadership.<sup>13</sup> Social conservatism in general, and opposition to abortion in particular, became politically prominent only in a secondary movement, with the aim of providing a more popular and righteous cause for an alliance of conservative Christians. While the debate is still ongoing, it is undisputed that by the end of the seventies, Evangelicals had assumed a clear position on several social issues, led by organizations more active than ever in the political process. Focus on the Family (1977), Concerned Women for America (1978) and the Moral Majority (1979) were founded by conservative ministers loudly protesting the changes progressive groups were advocating in the American social tissue.<sup>14</sup> Opposition to abortion was framed within a larger narrative of uncompromising defense of the traditional American family and Christian sexual morality, placing the issue alongside pornography, homosexuality and the broader changes in gender and familial relations progressive groups were pushing for.<sup>15</sup>

The eve of the 1980 presidential election was the first major political confrontation for the newly formed Religious Right. Conservative Christians sought a leader who would uphold a strong pro-life and pro-family national agenda, and they found their champion in republican candidate Ronald Reagan (1911-2004). In what has been described as one of the great paradoxes of American politics,<sup>16</sup> Evangelicals largely flocked under the Republican banner due to a combination of widespread dissatisfaction with the Carter presidency and Reagan's repeated sympathetic remarks on social conservative proposals,<sup>17</sup> resulting in a major electoral realignment. Throughout

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**13** The thesis has recently been brought forward in Balmer, *Bad Faith*. Rather than focusing on *Roe v. Wade*, the author suggests to look at *Green v. Connally* (1971). This court case paved the way for the Internal Revenue Service to revoke the tax-exempt status of several Evangelical educational institutions on the grounds of active racial segregation.

**14** One of the objectives of the Moral Majority was to champion "pro-life, pro-family, pro-moral, pro-America" values. Cf. Dowland, "Family Values", 614.

**15** Dowland, "Family Values", 616-17; Balmer, *Evangelicalism in America*, 119.

**16** The paradox stems from the strong contrast between the personal and spiritual statures of incumbent president Jimmy Carter (born 1924) and Ronald Reagan. A devout Southern Baptist and the first 'born-again' president, Jimmy Carter increased the role of religion in the actions of the US presidency. In contrast, Ronald Reagan had never displayed significant inclinations towards religiosity prior to his candidacy, and his status as divorcee should have made him an unsuitable candidate for conservative Christians. Cf. Balmer, *Evangelicalism in America*, 130.

**17** Occasionally re-evaluated, the Carter presidency had been notoriously unpopular at its time. As far as the Religious Right is concerned, Carter had initially received the support of his fellow Evangelicals on the grounds of shared religiosity. However, the Evangelical constituency was soon alienated by the presidency's accommodating position on social issues and its support for feminist and homosexual rights groups.

the entire Regan-Bush era, the Religious Right maintained a strategy centered on the idea that the election of a sympathetic president would result in the appointment of pro-life Supreme Court judges, the swift reversal of *Roe* and the passage of a Human Life Amendment, making abortion illegal on a federal level. These ideas were strongly echoed by the Republican party, whose attitude began to change to accommodate its new social conservative constituency. While internal disagreements on abortion were still recognized in 1976, these had weakened by 1980, and disappeared completely by 1984. From that point, the party was advocating for a constitutional amendment and the appointment of conservative judges.<sup>18</sup>

During these twelve years of Republican administration, Evangelicals' expectation of a decisive social conservative victory remained high,<sup>19</sup> but they were instead confronted with the fallacy of their own methods. During the Reagan presidency, social conservative proposals were consistently sidelined in favor of economic ones. The president himself often demonstrated a lack of support for those initiatives most important to Evangelicals, such as the human life and school prayer reinstitution amendments.<sup>20</sup> The George H.W. Bush (1924-2018) presidency did not deliver more satisfactory results, and Evangelicals found themselves baffled when the president they had strongly supported considered the possibility of an in-party compromise between the pro-life and pro-choice movements.<sup>21</sup> The Supreme Court also refrained from issuing drastic rulings on any of the abortion-related cases brought forward.<sup>22</sup> The election of pro-choice democratic candidate Bill Clinton in 1992 marked the end of the conservative Christians' first unsuccessful approach to politics.

The nineties thus came as a period of self-reflection, with old and new organizations correcting those shortcomings that had made their previous involvement so underwhelming. An examination of the experience of the Moral Majority, the biggest and most politically involved organization of the eighties, reveals that conservative Christians ultimately held little influence in party and national agenda set-

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Williams, *God's Own Party*. On the complex reasons behind the Evangelical dissatisfaction with the Carter presidency, see Dowland, "Family Values".

**18** Durham, *The Christian Right*, 89.

**19** On the eve of George H.W. Bush's election, Christianity Today reported that "[the election] makes it more likely that *Roe v. Wade* will be overturned, or at least substantially curtailed" (Barnes, "Issues for 1989", 47).

**20** Banwart, "Jerry Falwell", 150, 152; Martin, "How Ronald Reagan Wowed Evangelicals", 49.

**21** Cryderman, "Am-Bushed?".

**22** Instances in which a case on abortion was referred to the Supreme Court can be found at Lawton, "Could This Be the Year?", 36; Muck, "What If We Win?", 13; "Chipping Away at *Roe v. Wade*", 37; "Opposing Views", 48.

ting. Despite their mobilization as a large electorate, they were consistently outplayed by more experienced interest groups.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the end goals and especially the means were recognized as too unrealistic and sectarian, and therefore unfit for the world of politics.

### 3 A Changing Decade

The first change the Religious Right pursued aimed to enhance their leverage *vis-à-vis* their Republican allies. Quite early, influential groups such as Concerned Women for America and the newly founded Christian Coalition (1989) moved towards decentralizing their presence and creating a strong grass-roots base.<sup>24</sup> Without sacrificing their presence in Washington, these organizations created a nation-wide network of stable chapters and partnered with local conservative organizations in electoral battles all across the political pyramid, from school boards all the way up to state legislature.<sup>25</sup> The explicit aim of this strategy was not to support the Republican party *in se* but rather “[...] a particular kind of Republican party: pro-life, pro-family [supporting] religious conservative themes and values”.<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, many of the early battles of this new Religious Right were fought to elect social conservative candidates over moderate Republican candidates. This approach culminated in the election of 53 pro-life Congressional representatives and 8 pro-life governors.<sup>27</sup> The increased influence of Evangelicals within the Republican electorate and of social conservatives among the party ranks allowed the Religious Right to push further for stronger commitments to the pro-life cause. Indeed, the GOP was forced to adopt a clear pro-life position after influential groups such as Focus on the Family made severe threats of electoral boycott in response to serious attempts from the Republican party in 1996 to compromise on the issue of abortion.<sup>28</sup> From there on, Republican presidential candidates swiftly moved to voice their pro-life positions, even when they had previously taken

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<sup>23</sup> Marley perfectly conveys the legacy of the Reagan era when stating that “[...] the Christian Right was not nearly as important to Ronald Reagan as he was to them” (Marley, “Ronald Reagan”, 866), framing the Presidency as crucial for conservative Christian political engagement but overall indifferent to their agenda.

<sup>24</sup> Lawton, “Whatever Happened to the Religious Right?”, 44; “Robertson Regroups”.

<sup>25</sup> In 1992, the Christian Coalition had developed 350 chapters across 42 States. By 1994, the organization had 860 chapters across all states, and it had forged alliances with dominant local political entities in 12 states. Cf. “Robertson Regroups”; “Bringing in the Votes”, 42; Frame, “High Stakes for the Religious Right”, 63.

<sup>26</sup> Ralph Reed cit. in Frame, “Quick Change Artists”, 50.

<sup>27</sup> Frame, “Quick Change Artists”, 50.

<sup>28</sup> Kennedy, “Candidates Court Family Values Vote”, 78.

an opposing stance. This is evidenced by John McCain's (1936-2018) affirmation of his new pro-life beliefs in 2007, despite having once supported the 1996 pro-choice overture.<sup>29</sup>

The creation of a strong grass-roots base went hand in hand with the acquisition of increased political expertise. While the Moral Majority adapted forms and methods from the Civil Rights era, such as roundtables of conservative pastors and distribution of voting material,<sup>30</sup> the new organizations directly recruited politically involved individuals from within the congregations and supported their involvement in local politics.<sup>31</sup> The growth in political expertise is also evident at the leadership level. Despite Pat Robertson (born 1930) occupying the role of president, the *de facto* leadership of the coalition was left to Ralph Reed (born 1961), an experienced Republican strategist whose approach more closely resembled that of a politician rather than a preacher.<sup>32</sup> In the 2000s, a politically-experienced leadership also emerged in those groups not directly involved with political lobbying. In 2003, both Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council appointed political experts as their leaders, respectively appointing the former Secretary of Interior under the Reagan administration Donald Hodel (born 1935) and the Republican representative in the Louisiana House of Representatives Tony Perkins (born 1963). As conservative Christians became more accustomed to the world of politics, their numbers in the corridors of power notably increased. This was strongly evidenced under the George W. Bush presidency, as the President appointed many Evangelicals to key institutional positions.<sup>33</sup> Interpreting these appointments as unilateral strategic moves from the Republican party to solidify a conservative alliance would strongly downplay the evolution that the Religious Right had actively undergone in the previous decades. Rather, considering the influence that appointees held in policy making, the high number of Evangelical presidential appointments is indicative of the clout the Religious Right had garnered, as much as the level of political maturity its associates had reached.<sup>34</sup>

The second substantial change saw a redefinition of the overarching objectives and means into forms and modalities more fit for the complex world of politics. The strong Christian values on which the Religious Right had been founded led Evangelicals to approach pol-

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<sup>29</sup> Carnes, "Talking the Walk", 35.

<sup>30</sup> Banwart, "Jerry Falwell", 138.

<sup>31</sup> "Robertson Regroups"; Lawton, "The New Face(s) of the Religious Right", 44.

<sup>32</sup> A detailed study on the Christian Coalition history can be found in Watson, *The Christian Coalition*.

<sup>33</sup> Lindsay, "Ties that Bind", 886.

<sup>34</sup> Lindsay, "Ties that Bind", 902.

itics with religious fervor, maintaining a strong belief in irrefutable truths that must be defended at all costs.<sup>35</sup> Accepting compromises on such truths did not come easily, even when these concerned the means rather than the ends, as Evangelicals felt their own moral and religious integrity at stake.<sup>36</sup> In the early nineties, it became increasingly clear to certain politically-involved Evangelicals that a change in rhetoric and approach was necessary to appeal to those allies who did not share their same religious convictions. Reflecting on the prominence of religion in the 1992 Republican Convention, respected figures such as Don Eberly (born 1953)<sup>37</sup> and Richard Cizik<sup>38</sup> criticized the overly sectarian rhetoric as too polarizing and accessible only to the Religious Right, which ran the risk of Evangelicals being perceived as “just another power bloc to be pandered to”.<sup>39</sup> Yet, not all of the Religious Right would attempt to correct this perceived weakness, as Concerned Women for America and especially the Christian Coalition would again pioneer new forms of political engagement. Both organizations maintained a strongly pro-life end goal and consistently supported pro-life candidates through various elections with their lobby efforts, hoping to one day see *Roe* reversed. At the same time, they also acted towards making the agenda of the Religious Right less sectarian and more welcoming to a wider array of public policy issues not previously covered.

Similar to how the Moral Majority had framed being pro-family as an umbrella label to rally together a wide and divided conservative Christian electorate,<sup>40</sup> the organizations of the nineties took a broader and more welcoming approach to appeal to their non-wholly social conservative allies.<sup>41</sup> When finance and economy had previously appeared among the concerns of the Religious Right, they were limited to the allocation of federal funds to religious organizations and the

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**35** On the importance of faith and the theological justification behind Evangelical political activism, see Collins, *The Evangelical Moment*, 107-30; Balmer, *Evangelicalism in America*; Durham, *The Christian Right*, 105.

**36** As an extreme example, the fact that Clinton was both a devout Southern Baptist and a strong pro-choicer confused many Evangelicals to the point of questioning the sincerity of his faith. Yancey, “The Riddle of Bill Clinton’s Faith”, 24-9.

**37** Former White House aide for President Reagan, who would later work under President George W. Bush as deputy director of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.

**38** Vice President for Governmental Affairs of the National Association of Evangelicals, responsible for lobbying Congress on behalf of the organization.

**39** Don Eberly cit. in Lawton, “A Republican God?”, 52.

**40** Dowland, “Family Values”, 609.

**41** Reed, *Politically Incorrect*. This is a manifesto of the ideas and agendas of the Christian Coalition during those years. Setting the ideological biases aside, it represents a viable historical document on the shift that was occurring in the Religious Right.

tax-exempt status of religious institutions in their broadest sense.<sup>42</sup> The initiatives pushed forward during the Reagan-Bush era as financial measures against abortion were welcomed, but also interpreted as meager concessions from presidencies overall reluctant to seriously deliver on the social conservative agenda.

The programs of many Religious Right organizations of the nineties instead explicitly and systematically included the pursuit of financial alongside social conservatism, setting the two on the same path. The Christian Coalition led this push for the pro-family and pro-life labels to include principles that could resound with a moderate and economic conservative audience, such as tax relief for families with children, welfare reforms and the promotion of states' authority in the allocation of public funds.<sup>43</sup> The efforts to legitimize this broader agenda and the provision of economic answers to social, if not moral, questions peaked in the mid-nineties. For the 1994 mid-term elections, which resulted in Republicans gaining control of both congressional chambers, the party had produced a legislative blueprint known as the *Contract with America*.<sup>44</sup> The Christian Coalition lent its support and expertise to push the *Contract* forward, although it mainly focused on fiscal issues, and expected the party to eventually deliver some social conservative legislation in exchange. Despite this gesture of goodwill, the GOP largely ignored its Evangelical wing, leading the Coalition to force its hand with a social conservative *Contract with the American Family*, which they had publicly endorsed by the party leadership.<sup>45</sup> The disputes surrounding the contracts were more of a symptom of the underlying struggle between social and economic conservatives in the GOP rather than a shortcoming of the new approach, as a similar initiative will achieve more success 1996. By presenting the issue of abortion within the framework of small government and states' rights in the allocation of public funds, the Coalition and Concerned Women for America successfully lobbied for the Welfare Reform of 1996 to exclude state benefits for unwed minor mothers, instead allocating these resources to pro-life programs as opposed to abortion.<sup>46</sup> By the end of the decade, those initiatives that aimed to align social and economic concerns were

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<sup>42</sup> Balmer, *Evangelicalism in America*; Banwart, "Jerry Falwell", 141.

<sup>43</sup> Loconte, "Will The Religious Right gain Momentum in 1994?"; Curtis, "Putting Out A Contract"; Frame, "Payback Time?", 43-4.

<sup>44</sup> Newt Gingrich (1943), republican representative (1979-1999) and Speaker of the United States House of Representatives (1995-1999) played a key role in defining the Republican strategy and its relationship with the Religious Right during this period. Riley, *Party Government and the Contract with America*. Gillion, *The Pact*.

<sup>45</sup> Curtis, "Putting Out A Contract", 54.

<sup>46</sup> In the end, after much controversies and negotiations between the different components of the party and between Republicans and Democrats, the bill passed retaining

no longer perceived as weak compromises, but rather emphasized as success stories. One such case is the *Faith in Action* program promoted by Texas Governor George W. Bush for the 1997 state legislative session, which aimed at reducing welfare spending by easing regulation and oversight of faith-based charities.<sup>47</sup> The initiative garnered sympathy from conservative Christians and remained a point of interest and praise during the 2000 elections.<sup>48</sup>

While the scope of the pro-life label was broadened to include fiscal and economic concerns, its persistent end goal was being redefined with winnability in mind. As the criminalization of abortion on a federal level was more out of reach than ever at that time, pro-life campaigns moved to tackle smaller and more achievable objectives without abandoning the final goal of overturning *Roe*.<sup>49</sup> Rather than focusing on abortion in general, emphasis was placed on the abolition of a particular practice of late pregnancy termination known as partial birth abortion. The practice was a particularly controversial: it was already under scrutiny by the American Medical Association and unpopular among moderates and conservatives alike,<sup>50</sup> characteristics that made it ideal for a winnable battle. A proposal to ban the practice was supported twice in 1995 and 1997 by two-thirds of the House and a majority of the Senate, but resulted in a presidential veto both times due to a perceived lack of protection for the mother consistent with *Roe*. By the time of the second veto, States had already moved to place their own limitations or bans, resulting in a flurry of legislative and judicial confrontations that captured public opinion once more.<sup>51</sup> The possibility of a ban remained a central point during the 2000 election, with Republican candidate George W. Bush affirming his support in case of victory,<sup>52</sup> which led to the signing of the Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act in 2003.

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“the use of incentive for states to discourage out-of-wedlock births, [...] [provided that] the abortion rate must not rise”. Durham, *The Christian Right*, 94-6.

<sup>47</sup> Turek argues that the appeal of the initiative among conservative Christians lay in the fact that it “expanded Bush’s commitment to conservative political principles [...] into a comprehensive vision for enacting broader cultural change” (*Religious Rhetoric*, 987).

<sup>48</sup> It is perhaps relevant to note that Ralph Reed, former executive director of the Christian Coalition, is among the advisers hired by George W. Bush. “Bush Faith-Based Plan”; Carnes, “A Presidential Hopeful”, 63.

<sup>49</sup> On the increased prevalence of attention paid to partial-birth abortion and its wider implications on the abortion debate of the time, see Armitage, *Political Language*.

<sup>50</sup> Ferranti, “‘D and X’ Abortion Ban Faces Presidential Veto”, 74.

<sup>51</sup> From 1997 to 1999, 25 States had pushed forward some form of ban on the practice. Moore, “Partial-Birth Bans Make Little Headway in States”, 18; Armitage, *Political Language*.

<sup>52</sup> Carnes, “Republican Candidates Court Conservative Early”, 17.

Finally, this trend of changes aimed at appealing to a wider audience also manifested in initiatives pursued outside the realm of politics. In parallel to lobbying, Religious Right organizations had long been producing literature, radio programs and ministries, as well as offering counselling and therapy services characterized by a strong pro-life position.<sup>53</sup> Throughout the nineties and early two-thousands, these efforts intensified through their partnership with Crisis Pregnancy Centers to oppose abortion clinics by establishing their own network of service providers.<sup>54</sup> Groups such as Focus on the Family and the Southern Baptist Convention purchased sonogram machines to enhance the counselling efficiency of several Centers they partnered with, an initiative that it is still ongoing to this day. Despite having been a reality since the late sixties, the Crisis Pregnancy Centers would receive much more attention beginning in the nineties, as they solved two main issues the pro-life movement was dealing with at the time. After the violent turn taken by the most extreme wing of the pro-life movement,<sup>55</sup> many voices called for a warmer and more compassionate approach.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, Evangelicals might have been compelled to look for other non-political areas of engagement in response to the difficulties encountered in obtaining federal limits on certain abortive practices.

Through these changing strategies for both political and non-political involvement, it is possible to see the broader evolution the Religious Right was undergoing. These initiatives all relied upon appealing to a broader audience beyond conservative Christians and pursued this objective accordingly. The expansion of the pro-life and pro-family agenda to systematically comprehend fiscal and economic concerns sought to reconcile the differences between the social and economic conservative wings of the Republican party, employing a give-and-take logic that applied financial solutions to social issues. The pursuit of a partial-birth abortion ban helped keep the abortion debate not only highly relevant, but also strongly anchored in a wide consensus for what was a pro-life initiative. The support given to

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<sup>53</sup> Zoba, “Daring to Disciple America”.

<sup>54</sup> Crisis Pregnancy Centers are local non-profit organizations staffed by volunteers who offer a series of services to pregnant women, with the explicit aim of persuading them to carry the pregnancy to term. They represent a highly decentralized operation, as each center is a reflection of its local volunteers. This said, their services have spanned from counselling and direct economic support to violent sensibilization. Stafford, “Inside Crisis Pregnancy Centers”, 20; Matthews-Green, “Wanted: A New Pro-life Strategy”, 27; “Refocusing the Prolife Agenda”, 29.

<sup>55</sup> On the violent turn of organizations such as Operation Rescue and other fringe groups, see Durham, *The Christian Right*, 97.

<sup>56</sup> Matthews-Green, “Wanted: A New Prolife Strategy”, 27; “Refocusing the Prolife Agenda”, 29.



Crisis Pregnancy Centers also sought to gather public sympathy by engaging in the debate with a more lenient and less confrontational style, while at the same time enhancing its relevancy thanks to the highly decentralized and grass-roots nature of the Centers.

## 4 Conclusions

The Religious Right's journey since its debut has been one characterized by persistence and change. At the end of Reagan's presidency, the Evangelical-Republican alliance and Evangelical political engagement at large were not solidified, as observers both within and outside the Evangelical world still wondered what the future might hold for this constituency.<sup>57</sup> Realizing the opportunities offered by politics and recognizing their past shortcomings, new forces within the Religious Right pushed for a redefinition of what had until that point been an electoral bloc into a stronger, more prominent political voice.

The nineties have been highlighted as a period of fundamental changes, as organizations reshaped their structures and approaches to enhance their strength *vis-à-vis* their political rivals as much as their political allies. The development of a nationwide grass-roots presence has played a central role in giving conservative Christians the edge to leverage their position within the Republican party. At the same time, the level of political expertise available in these organizations increased through the promotion of their members for different degrees of institutional engagement and the appointment of political experts rather than preachers as leaders. The establishment of a strong association between financial and social conservatism has helped to advance the legislature process and to actually achieve important results. The Religious Right pursued smaller and achievable objectives, legitimizing a gradual strategy for its social conservative agenda that entailed patiently waiting for better circumstances without losing sight of the final objectives.

This interpretation should not be universally applied to all conservative Christian organizations, as the Religious Right is not a monolith and even its leading groups felt differently about the need to change the nature of their political engagement.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, a precise trend has been observed whereby the nature and strategies of these organizations changed profoundly, though at different speeds

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<sup>57</sup> Lawton, "Republican or Reaganites?", 39. Lawton, "Democrats Gain Momentum", 38.

<sup>58</sup> Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council alternated between skepticism and outright opposition towards these approaches. Frame, "Payback Time?"; Curtis, "Putting Out a Contract"; Gardner, "Wild Card Election", 83.

and with varying levels of commitment. By the time of Bush Jr.'s presidency, this evolution had run its course and the Religious Right had matured into a new and more well-versed political force. More importantly, the shift towards pragmatism persisted under this sympathetic presidency. If the Religious Right had reverted to its practices from the eighties after a particularly unfavorable conjunction, the experience of the nineties could have reasonably been considered a small political parenthesis, a coping strategy to survive a hostile political environment. Instead, when the Republican president was sworn into office, the once customary promises of a swift and decisive criminalization of abortion were notably absent and attention was given to those proposals at the time pending in Congress.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, during these eight years of Republican administration, formulations such as "managing the expectations", "incremental approach" and "undermining without overruling" started to become more popular among politically involved Evangelicals.<sup>60</sup>

By the end of the nineties, the Religious Right had emerged as a very different political force from what it had been at the height of the Moral Majority. Coming to terms with the reality of politics meant acknowledging that the uncompromising approach of the Moral Majority model was flawed from the beginning. Restoring the social and moral tissue of the U.S. remained the final goal of this political coalition, but the pursuit of this goal drastically changed. Space was left for a more pragmatic approach to policy making, anchored in gradualism as a principle and compromise as a means.

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**59** These were the ban of partial-birth abortion and the Born Alive Infant Protection Act. "Changing Hearts and Laws", 38

**60** "Undermining without overruling" appeared in a 2006 editorial of Christianity Today as the new key tactic regarding *Roe v. Wade*; "incremental approach" and "managing expectations" were the terms used in 2003 by Richard Cizik and Ken Connor (at the time President of the Family Research Council) to describe the attitude towards the legislative process. Respectively in "The Art of Abortion Politics", 73; Stricherz, "New Congress, New Agenda".

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# Churches Before the Russian-Ukrainian War

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**Abstract** Besides its effects on the world political scenario, the war conflict between Russia and Ukraine has also disrupted the already powder keg-like and torn-apart Ukrainian canonical enclosure with a number of repercussions in the ecumenical field. As the war escalates, the role of the Churches, with special regard to the Orthodox groups and the Catholic Church, fits into a very broad process encompassing ecclesiastical geopolitics, human rights and social concepts. The 'waltz' of stances and statements provides us with a changing framework but, at the same time, suggests some trajectories that help us shed light on a precarious and uncertain future.

**Keywords** Russian-Ukrainian war. Ecumenism. Ecclesiastical geopolitics. Orthodox Church. Catholic Church.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Premise. Human Rights, Social Concept, Ideology, Territoriality: A Comparison Between the ROC and the Ecumenical Patriarchate. – 3 Ukraine: Ecclesiastical and Political Reflections Before and During 2018 Events. – 4 Some Consequences of the 'Schism'. – 5 The Churches, the Conflict and the Catholic-Orthodox Relations. – 6 Final Remarks.



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## 1 Introduction

In approaching the investigation of phenomena and events in the making, it should be premised that the focus will be exclusively centred on matters of ecclesiastical geopolitics and its consequences in the ecumenical field. We will stick to the bare presentation of the facts, focusing on reactions, statements and postures coming from or concerning the religious world. Compared to cases in which the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the Ecumenical Patriarchate (EP) had previously come to a confrontation over jurisdictional issues – Estonia, the USA and France being the most relevant ones – the Ukrainian case differs in some crucial features:

- Ukraine is a country with a vast majority Orthodox denomination and of deep religious sensitivity.<sup>1</sup> Within the history of Orthodoxy, Ukraine holds a very high symbolic value, especially for Russian culture. The conversion of Kyivan Rus' to Christianity, traditionally fixed at 988 following the baptism of Vladimir the Great and the inhabitants of the capital city, marks the founding of the Rus' Church and the origins of the famous image of Kyiv as the 'Russian Jerusalem'.<sup>2</sup>
- The ecclesiastical clash between Constantinople and Moscow generated a unilateral schism that is still unsolved. While in Estonia a similar rift was soon patched up, in Ukraine the tones have grown increasingly sour, producing a deep wound within Orthodoxy.<sup>3</sup>
- The Ukrainian case, well before the large-scale Russian invasion in February 2022, saw the active participation of local and global political institutions. The presidents and governments of Russia and Ukraine (and, more marginally, of the USA as well) have been heavily intervening in the spiritual sphere trying to orient the outcomes of the dispute, overlapping with the demands of the churches for their own political aims.
- The dispute over canonical territory<sup>4</sup> is not limited to the political-religious context but is inscribed in an armed conflict.

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<sup>1</sup> This is evidenced by data resulting from the religious survey, for the period 2010-18: Державні документи, заяви і звернення Всеукраїнської Ради Церков і релігійних організацій, "Особливості релігійного і церковно-релігійного самовизначення українських громадян".

<sup>2</sup> On the importance and sanctity of Kyiv (*Kiev Zlatoverchij*) for the Russian Orthodox world cf. Merlo, "Kiev città santa?".

<sup>3</sup> Bremer, Brünning, Kizenko, *Orthodoxy in Two Manifestations?*.

<sup>4</sup> The notion of canonical territory is much debated in Orthodox Christianity. Starting with the Canons of the Apostles, different autocephalous Churches have developed the topic with different ecclesiological, pastoral, theological, and geopolitical implications. Cf. Grigoriță, "L'Orthodoxie entre automomie et synodalité"; Hilarion, "La nozione



Intra-Orthodox issues appear to be closely intertwined with the war events that have been going on in the country since 2014.

- This combination of elements led to the involvement of the Catholic Church in an intra-Orthodoxy divergence. The convergence of war and religious dispute somehow forced the pope to get directly involved and use his influence in building a path to peace. Many of his statements have been interpreted as a pro-side stand: the irritation of the Russian Federation that followed some of the pope's interventions – actually accused on other occasions of not properly speaking out against the invasion – affected, for example, the already fragile Catholic-Russian Orthodox relations, resulting in the cancellation of the meeting between Francis and Kirill scheduled for 2022. In this intermingling of geopolitical and ecclesiastical factors, the entire ecumenical dialogue is facing a diplomatic disruption that is extremely difficult to manage for all the actors involved, poised between a cautious approach that keeps glimmers open and a condemnatory attitude that raises walls too high. On its part, the ROC is called upon to definitively come to terms with its relationship with state power.

Such a state of things shows the peculiar seriousness of the Ukrainian case, a crucial divide for the near future of ecumenism.

## **2      Premise. Human Rights, Social Concept, Ideology, Territoriality: A Comparison Between the ROC and the Ecumenical Patriarchate**

Addressing the geopolitical and jurisdictional issues arising from the Moscow-Constantinople watershed without dealing with the theological and anthropological divergence on the human person, human rights, freedom and pluralism, meaning the social concept of the churches under analysis, would have meant marring the present work with a serious epistemological gap.

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di territorio canonico"; Bartholomeos I, *Incontro al mistero*, 305; Montan, *La Chiesa Particolare*, 45-8; Roudometof, "Greek Orthodoxy, Territoriality, and Globality"; Agadjanian, Rousselet, "Globalization and Identity". The ROC's vision is contained in the "Statute of the Russian Orthodox Church adopted by the Council of Bishops in 2000, amended by the Council of Bishops in 2008 and 2011 and adopted as amended by the Council of Bishops in 2013": <https://mospatusa.com/files/STATUTE-OF-THE-RUSSIAN-ORTHODOX-CHURCH.pdf>. This issue has enormous repercussions in the theological and ecclesiological fields on issues such as authority, synodality, ecclesial communion and primacy. It has been discussed, on several occasions, by the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue Between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church (as a whole).

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For the Moscow Patriarchate (MP), human rights originate from a Western historical-cultural background that is not shared and perceived as foreign to the Orthodox tradition.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, its primate, Patriarch Kirill, identifies the UDHR as the ultimate victory of anthropocentrism.<sup>6</sup> The ROC was the first Orthodox Church to take the initiative in 2000 to systematize its social concept in parallel with the pan-Orthodox conciliar framework; an event that represented a major and much-discussed innovation in the field of Orthodoxy. The process began with the publication of *The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church* (2000), a document that ranges over many issues such as human rights, bioethics, the environment, and relations with political institutions. The Bishops' Council based the idea of human rights on the biblical teaching of man as a being in the image and likeness of God, a creature therefore ontologically free.<sup>7</sup> With the development of secularism this inalienable acquisition would be transformed into a notion of the rights of the individual in which, having removed him from his relationship with God, the freedom of the personality is transmuted into the protection of the personal will expressed within the limits set by a state that should guarantee, in return, certain standards of individual well-being within society.<sup>8</sup> The clash of civilizations<sup>9</sup> that the ROC outlines to divide it from the West is remanifested, in 2006, in the document *Declaration on Human Rights and Dignity*<sup>10</sup> issued by the World Russian People's Council – a nongovernmental organization chaired by the Patriarch of Moscow and based in the Patriarchate's facilities – which comes across as decidedly anti-Western, anti-liberal, full of ideological positions. The definitive Teaching of Human Rights is then formulated in 2008 directly by the Bishops' Council of the ROC under the title *The Russian Orthodox Church's Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Liberty, and Rights*.<sup>11</sup> If dignity is innate and not even sin can dent it ontologically, it can be obscured by an immoral life. The dignified life, a circumstance that enables the transition from image to likeness,

<sup>5</sup> Stoeckl, "Il ruolo della Chiesa ortodossa russa", 108. On the stance of the Roman Catholic Church regarding the development of the human rights debate cf. Menozzi, *Chiesa e diritti umani*; Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine*.

<sup>6</sup> Kirill, "Obstoyatel'stva novogo vremeni: liberalizm, traditsionalizm i moral'nyye tsennosti ob'yedinyayushcheisya Yevropy", quoted in Stoeckl, "The Human Rights Debate", 217.

<sup>7</sup> Chiesa Ortodossa Russa, *Fondamenti della dottrina sociale*, (IV. 6).

<sup>8</sup> Chiesa Ortodossa Russa, *Fondamenti della dottrina sociale*, (IV. 7).

<sup>9</sup> Stoeckl, *The Russian Orthodox Church*, 56.

<sup>10</sup> Всемирный Русский Народный Собор, *Декларация о правах и достоинстве*.

<sup>11</sup> Священного Синода Русской Православной Церкви, *Основы учения Русской Православной Церкви*.

can only be achieved through efforts to seek virtue and spiritual purity, reject error, and direct oneself to the good by a righteous employment of one's personal responsibility. Received dignity cannot be lost, but it is valued exclusively at the time of correct individual moral choices. The notion of dignity outlined is thus integrally connected to the ideas of morality and responsibility<sup>12</sup> and cannot be contemplated independently.<sup>13</sup> Since human dignity is exercised only in morality, freedom, for the ROC, requires the observance of duties before the possession of rights. The doctrine of freedom expressed by the *Teaching* stems from the indictment of secular thought of ignoring the sinful nature of man in an anthropocentrism that focuses solely on "negative freedom", man's freedom to live according to his own individual preferences and rights, i.e., "freedom of choice". In contrast, the MP prefers to focus on "positive freedom", which is associated with a life of dignity, and which combines individual rights with collective duties. The former "freedom of choice", which can be interpreted as permissiveness, now becomes "freedom from evil", that liberation from sin that theology wants worked by Christ: without religious, spiritual and ethical dimensions there is no freedom, no human dignity.<sup>14</sup> Since Orthodoxy considers the human being primarily in the context of his relations with the people of God and the community of the Church, his dignity is maximally manifested when he lives and fulfils his love for his neighbour in the social world, revealing the interrelational nature of the human person embodied in the соборность *soborny*, the principle of the spiritual community of people living together in 'catholicity'.<sup>15</sup> A notion of human rights that separates the individual from the social communion and its shared moral values would at once nullify the transcendental dimension of man and the notion that the community is more than the complex of individuals, in that subtle but fundamental difference that separates the conditions of "living in a community" and "being communion".<sup>16</sup> "The ability to direct one's will to good or evil is called freedom"<sup>17</sup> confirms Patriarch Kirill, supported by Metropolitan Hilarion in stating that "for the believer true freedom is not the permissibility of everything, but the liberation from sin, the overcoming in one self of

<sup>12</sup> Священного Синода Русской Православной Церкви, *Основы учения Русской Православной Церкви*.

<sup>13</sup> Stoeckl, "The Human Rights Debate", 221-3.

<sup>14</sup> Stoeckl, "The Human Rights Debate", 225.

<sup>15</sup> Marsh, Payne, "Religiosity, Tolerance and Respect", 204.

<sup>16</sup> McGuckin, "The Issue of Human Rights", 188.

<sup>17</sup> Kirill, "God's Design of Man and the Freedom of Will", in *Freedom and Responsibility*, 84.

everything that hinders spiritual perfection".<sup>18</sup> It is in the context of the community that this is realized, a community to which the person owes his moral responsibility and in which at the same time he receives, as a member, equal dignity with any other member. What has been expounded so far intersects, in a fine as legitimate operation conducted by the ROC, with the political sphere. Kirill has long clashed with his European counterparts, both religious and secular, over the Western liberal provenance of human rights, condemning their misuse for the purpose of insulting and damaging religious and national values and ensuring that traditional Christian morality was slowly integrated and diluted into the system of human rights and freedoms, until it disappeared.<sup>19</sup> This system, a new universal standard, also aims, Kirill argues, to sideline Russia and the Orthodox tradition through imposed processes of Europeanization and globalization,<sup>20</sup> forcing acceptance of liberal stereotypes of behaviour without critical evaluation and presumptuously scorning the valuable contribution the Orthodox world and Russia could make.<sup>21</sup> The collective nature of human rights and the individual's obligations to the community stand out in the basic teaching promoted by the ROC where it is explicitly stated that a person does not have the right to go against his or her own culture or nation.<sup>22</sup> According to Stoeckl, the *Teaching* is used by the ROC as a foreign policy tool.<sup>23</sup> The previously enunciated clash of civilizations is presented as a clash between a secular, individualist and liberal worldview and a religious, communitarian and traditional vision.<sup>24</sup> The ROC does not simply position itself against an individualistic understanding of human rights but represents itself as the sole defender of a conception of human rights that includes the ethics and obligations to society that the UDHR itself speaks of in Article 29, rejecting an expansive interpretation of HR and advocating, supported by Russia,<sup>25</sup> the defence of "traditional values" and resistance against "ideological monopoly in the sphere of human rights":<sup>26</sup> the rights claimed by the Lgbtq+ community and feminist groups, the various rights to euthanasia,

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<sup>18</sup> Hilarion, *Orthodox Witness Today*, 228.

<sup>19</sup> Kirill, "The Russian Church and the Christian Dimension of Human Rights", in *Freedom and Responsibility*, 131-6.

<sup>20</sup> Marsh, Payne, "Religiosity, Tolerance and Respect", 206.

<sup>21</sup> Kirill, "The Russian Church and the Christian Dimension of Human Rights".

<sup>22</sup> Священного Синода Русской Православной Церкви, *Основы учения Русской Православной Церкви о достоинстве, свободе и правах человека*, IV.3; IV.5.

<sup>23</sup> Stoeckl, "L'insegnamento della Chiesa ortodossa russa", 104.

<sup>24</sup> Stoeckl, "L'insegnamento della Chiesa ortodossa russa", 107.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. UNHRC, *Promoting Human Rights*.

<sup>26</sup> Stoeckl, *Il ruolo della Chiesa ortodossa russa*, 112.

abortion, human cell testing, civil unions, and surrogacy are portrayed as explicitly opposed to “traditional values”. “No state or group of states has the right to monopolize the interpretation of human rights”, Lavrov stated, affirming that the Russian Federation together with its partners would continue to persevere on the issue of the intrinsic relationship between human rights and traditional values,<sup>27</sup> identified as “dignity”, “freedom” and “responsibility”. The ROC’s alternative proposal is known as *Christian humanism*.<sup>28</sup> It is meant to confront “Christianophobia”,<sup>29</sup> a specific form of aggressive secularism that targets, in the ROC’s reading, Christian-majority European regions through the implementation of the liberal conception of HR by which the rights of minorities and minority religions tend to be privileged in spite of those of the majority, without considering how precisely the latter may be the most vulnerable group.<sup>30</sup> The ROC decides to stand as the spokesperson for Christians in Europe, carving out a positive/propositional role for itself by implementing an approach that can be defined as “constructive traditionalism”<sup>31</sup> which allows it to position itself as an interlocutor in a cross-cultural debate and to open itself with ideological renewal to modern society without renouncing a conservative stance.<sup>32</sup> In this struggle against ideological monopolies on the issue of human rights and in support of “traditional values” led by Kirill, the ROC will come to place the values of the Motherland and the nation<sup>33</sup> above human rights, going on to play the role of the moral agenda<sup>34</sup> of Russian foreign policy. The model promoted by the ROC (constructive traditionalism-Christian humanism) is based on a series of conceptual opposites:

- neo-liberal ideology vs. conservative traditionalist view
- secularism vs. religion
- individual human rights vs. collective rights of community, nation, family.<sup>35</sup>

Regarding the territory issue, the ROC adopts the so-called reterritorialization. The reterritorializing current draws on the traditional Orthodox social mission of “reuniting the dispersed” regardless of their

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<sup>27</sup> Stoeckl, *Il ruolo della Chiesa ortodossa russa*, 113.

<sup>28</sup> Stoeckl, “The Human Rights Debate”, 219.

<sup>29</sup> Stoeckl, “The Human Rights Debate”, 220.

<sup>30</sup> ROC, “Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting”.

<sup>31</sup> Stoeckl, “The Human Rights Debate”, 221.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Stepanova, “The Place of the Church in Society”.

<sup>33</sup> Stoeckl, *The Russian Orthodox Church*, 88.

<sup>34</sup> Stoeckl, *The Russian Orthodox Church*, 91-118.

<sup>35</sup> Stoeckl, “The Human Rights Debate”, 218.

ethnic, political, and social differences, in a reinterpretation that recasts the mission as an action to counter contemporary forms of pluralism aimed instead at dividing, separating, and crumbling the religious memory of peoples.<sup>36</sup> In the case of Russia, this tendency has fallen into the overlap between the ROC's mission and the purposes of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Especially since the Putin administration, Payne<sup>37</sup> reports, the two bodies have strengthened their collaboration and worked together on multiple fronts in order to secure the rights and "spiritual security" of the Russian diaspora, regain property that formerly belonged to the Russian Empire, lost during the communist period, and expand the Russian government's influence in the world. The ROC, through the spread of Russian Orthodox Christianity, signaled that it was united with the state in promoting a greater Russia, operating the equivalence 'Orthodoxy equals Russianness'. In the 2000 *Russian National Security Concept*, Putin administration chose to pursue a state policy that would not only protect Russia's cultural and spiritual-moral heritage and historical traditions, but also prohibit the use of individual freedom to give vent to violence or primal instincts in order to maintain the spiritual and moral well-being of the population.<sup>38</sup> With the definition of "spiritual security", Putin brought religion under the aegis of the state, superimposing identity, national culture and Orthodoxy. In this, the effective polarized pattern of an Orthodox Russia bound to its own spiritual, cultural and moral traditions opposed and attacked by militant secularism, foreign religions, customs, erroneous and sinful ideals was replayed. Since the entire national apparatus is in danger, the defence of faith thus becomes a matter of national security. This marks the boundary of freedom of conscience<sup>39</sup> and serves as a means of compacting the Russian Orthodox people against threats to their spiritual and cultural well-being, thereby limiting the amount of freedom experienced in civil society.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, Putin was explicit in this regard when he stated that "in the dialogue with other Sister-Churches, the Russian Orthodox Church has always defended and hopefully will continue to defend the national and spiritual identity of Russians".<sup>41</sup> Russians, however, are not only residents within the Federation, but anyone who is part of the Russian diaspora in the world. The state then, by such an operation, asserts the right to intervene to safeguard the spiritual security of any Russian

<sup>36</sup> Payne, "Towards an Orthodox Understanding", 613.

<sup>37</sup> Payne, "Spiritual Security", 712-13.

<sup>38</sup> Russian Security Council, 2000 *Russian National Security Concept*.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Elkner, "Spiritual security in Putin's Russia".

<sup>40</sup> Payne, "Spiritual Security", 716.

<sup>41</sup> "Russian Orthodox Church to work for Russian identity - Putin", Interfax, 3 February, 2009, quoted in Payne, "Spiritual Security", 715.

(who as such can only be Orthodox) in any country in the world: wherever there are Russians in the world there is the ROC, and wherever there is the ROC there is the Russian Federation. Payne<sup>42</sup> and Zarakhovich's<sup>43</sup> thesis is that the ROC and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs work together on the transnational expansion of the Federation and the strengthening of Russian culture in the world through a globalized church that would act as the main ideological arm of the Russian state and a vital foreign policy tool, so that a superpower such as Russia would come to correspond to a "superchurch". Outside national borders, the ROC would therefore move as a geopolitical actor aiming to expand Russian influence in the world. The exercise of joint church-state diplomacy emerges clearly when Lavrov<sup>44</sup> declares that the Foreign Ministry actively assists Russian diaspora communities in meeting their spiritual needs, including by building new houses of worship, while Kirill<sup>45</sup> states that he works with institutions for the unification of the Russian people, to promote "Russianness" in strengthening the people's union with their homeland, and for the transfer of churches built around the world before the communist period to Russia, as property belonging to the Federation and not to the ROC. For Kirill, any principle of independence and acculturation is to be rejected: the goal of the Moscow Patriarchate is to prevent the assimilation that invests Russian Orthodox outside the Federation, so as to keep them culturally separate and faithfully anchored in Russian religious identity.<sup>46</sup> Russia, in its attempt to consolidate itself as a world superpower, uses the ROC as a means to serve as a unifying and centralizing identity and cultural factor.<sup>47</sup> Considering that the ROC does not recognize the interpretation of canon 28 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council, it openly challenges the Ecumenical Patriarchate as the voice of world Orthodoxy.<sup>48</sup> Thus, while embodying the model of reterritorialization, the Moscow Patriarchate, like the Ecumenical Patriarchate promoter of deterritorialization, also acts, outside the dialectical contrast, according to transnational logic and global aspirations. The ROC however, in being transnational, still pursues the invigoration of Russian national identity.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Payne, "Spiritual Security", 726-7.

<sup>43</sup> Zarakhovich, "Putin's Reunited Russian Church".

<sup>44</sup> The Diplomat, "Diplomacy Needs a Moral Foundation".

<sup>45</sup> Kirill, "Cooperation Between the Russian Orthodox Church and Russian Diplomacy", 158-9.

<sup>46</sup> Payne, "Spiritual Security", 722.

<sup>47</sup> Payne, "Spiritual Security", 727.

<sup>48</sup> Payne, "Spiritual Security", 725.

<sup>49</sup> Agadjanian, Rousselet, "Globalization and Identity", 40-1.

Like the ROC, the EP has also developed specific interpretive perspectives, directions, directives and guiding principles on human rights and social ethos,<sup>50</sup> for the first time independently in the document *For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church*,<sup>51</sup> the result of the three-year work of a Special Commission chaired by Chrysavgis, approved by the Holy and Sacred Synod in January 2020. The urgency of the work undoubtedly lies in the pressing need, faced with the challenges of contemporary times, to explicate a social concept capable of clearly explaining “the axiomatic and self-evident truths”<sup>52</sup> of theology and to pronounce on such central issues as human rights, racism, bioethics, climate change, social justice, politics and secularism, wealth distribution, migration crisis, war, ecumenical dialogue, and the relationship between science, technology and religion. It is reasonable to read in the publication of such a document the desire to express the full and complete worldview of the EP and to define its (and the Church’s) mission on earth, consequently providing a valid model and example for the other churches as well and, at the same time, a response to the previously unilateral systematization of the ROC. The goal of the Commission, as we read in the “Preface”, was to strive “to avoid empty abstractions and to offer concrete moral proposals”.<sup>53</sup> The human being, conceived as the receptacle of divine love, consequently enjoys an “infinite and inherent dignity”, an “effect of God’s image” in everyone (§12). He is called to become a partaker of the divine nature by the attainment of ‘theosis’ and to live through participation in the community of the body of Christ, where everyone can enter into full union with God, in an overlap of spiritual life and social life (§3). An entire chapter is devoted to human rights. It states that since “the historical roots of such ideas reach down deep into the soil of the Gospel”, Orthodox Christians “should happily adopt the language of human rights” which, although it “may not say all that can and should be said about the profound dignity and glory of creatures fashioned after the image and likeness of God”, nevertheless constitutes “a language that honours that reality in a way that permits international and inter-faith cooperation in the work of civil rights and civil justice, and that therefore says much that should be said”. In light of this, “the Orthodox Church” – in the conception of the EP – “lends its voice to the call to protect and advance human rights everywhere, and to recognize those rights as both fundamental to and inalienable from every single human life” (§61). A similar argumentative procedure is conducted

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Elsner, “Toward an Orthodox Social Ethos?”.

<sup>51</sup> Ecumenical Patriarchate, *For the Life of the World*.

<sup>52</sup> McGuckin, “The Issue of Human Rights”, 179.

<sup>53</sup> Bentley Hart, Chrysavgis, “Preface”.



with regard to human freedom. “True human freedom” – the document states in full adherence to Orthodox theology – “is more than the mere indeterminate power of individuals to choose what they wish to do. [...] It is the realization of one’s nature in its own proper good end [...] which for the human person entails freely seeking union with God”. But even if the “conventions of human rights cannot achieve this freedom for any of us” – the positive freedom that lies not in the exercise of individual choice but in the opportunity to escape the constraints and boundaries of human nature<sup>54</sup> – this does not detract from the fact that “those conventions can help to assure individuals and communities liberty from an immense variety of destructive and corrupting forces” reasoning that “the language of human rights is indispensable in negotiating the principles of civil justice and peace” and at the same time “serves the highest aspirations of human nature by enunciating and defending the inviolable dignity of every soul” (§62). The change in approach from the ROC’s dissertations – notwithstanding that the documents are inevitably shaped by the contextual challenges of a historical era in constant mutation – appears evident, just as different are the intentions and purposes and irreconcilable are quite a few landfalls on issues of social concept. The defensive and conservative attitude closed to the forms of the contemporary world promoted by the MP, though mitigated by a sincere proactive and constructive spirit, becomes in the case of the EP all-round confessional openness, closeness to the instances of actuality, without relinquishing critical judgment. Such a conciliatory vision, theologically traceable to the order of divine economy, leads the document to declare that

Orthodox Christians should support the language of human rights, not because it is a language fully adequate to all that God intends for his creatures, but because it preserves a sense of the inviolable uniqueness of every person, and of the priority of human goods over national interests, while providing a legal and ethical grammar upon which all parties can, as a rule, arrive at certain basic agreements (§12).<sup>55</sup>

The approach advocated by the EP is that of a ‘spiritual ecumenicity’, a form of globalization in which the bonds of love, brotherhood and cooperation should unite all human beings of every ethnicity, language and culture, while safeguarding the distinction and particularity of any religious or cultural minority.<sup>56</sup> Rejecting the theory

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<sup>54</sup> Payne, “Towards an Orthodox Understanding”, 620.

<sup>55</sup> Ecumenical Patriarchate, *For the Life of the World*.

<sup>56</sup> Bartholomew, *Address Given at the 1999 Annual Davos Meeting*.

that globalization is nothing more than “a means of making humanity homogeneous, of influencing the masses and causing a single, unified and unique mode of thought to prevail”,<sup>57</sup> the See of Constantinople, in the figure of Patriarch Bartholomew, is in the forefront of defending the religious freedom of every minority and a “civil society based on pluralism, tolerance, respect of human and minority rights and democracy”.<sup>58</sup> “Above all, there must be respect for the rights of the minority within every majority”, Bartholomew argues, because “when and where the rights of the minority are observed, the society will for the most part be just and tolerant”.<sup>59</sup> Certainly, one could simplistically assume that such a pattern of inclusive and welcoming “Christian globalization” based on the inalienable rights that God has granted to human beings might constitute in the case of the EP a response to its current minority status in a hostile country with a clear Islamic majority. To assert this, however, would be to completely ignore the theological perspective that the EP has long developed and that Bartholomew’s Patriarchate in particular advocates and supports. As argued by Moltmann<sup>60</sup> and Payne,<sup>61</sup> Trinitarian theology fully legitimizes this positioning. The model of plurality in diversity expressed by Trinitarianism designates a communion of love, harmony and reciprocity that, by virtue of the necessity of relationship, interprets otherness as an indispensable part of unity. According to this view, human society should be based, using the patristic understanding of the relationship between the three persons of the Trinity, on the pattern of sociality and community of its heavenly counterpart. “Our social program is the doctrine of the Trinity”,<sup>62</sup> Bartholomew confirms. Human beings are called to reproduce on earth the perichoresis or movement of mutual love that unites, in a *koinônia* of love, the three persons of the triune God.<sup>63</sup> Since only within human consortium is the person able to exercise his freedom, the other becomes the signifies of every human being’s life.<sup>64</sup> Living in communion and relationship with the other (the religious

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<sup>57</sup> Bartholomew, *Address Given at the 1999 Annual Davos Meeting*.

<sup>58</sup> Bartholomew, “Speech at 4th meeting between the Orthodox Church, the European People’s Party and the European Democrats Group in Istanbul, (June 2000)”, quoted in Maghioros, Tsironis, “Human Rights and Orthodoxy”, 230.

<sup>59</sup> Bartholomew, “Address of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to the Plenary Assembly of the European Parliament”, in *In the World, Yet Not of the World*, 160-70.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*; Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*.

<sup>61</sup> Payne, “Towards an Orthodox Understanding”.

<sup>62</sup> Bartholomew, “The Role of Religion”, 441.

<sup>63</sup> Bartholomew, “The Role of Religion”, 441.

<sup>64</sup> Yannaras, *Variations on the Song of Songs*, 4.

other, the political other, the ideological other, etc.) becomes for Orthodox Christians a necessary consequence of their belief: in a context in which everyone is the same thing, one would therefore nullify the relationship that underlies the nature of the *prósōpon*. If the concept of the individual is the destruction of the person and his or her social nature, the relationship in which human beings exist with each other is the ultimate guarantor of their uniqueness, specificity, dignity. “Rooted in the very ontology of the person as revealed in the Trinity, one’s otherness recognized by another includes the recognition of his or her freedom”:<sup>65</sup> we can reject assumptions that look outside theology for the reasons for such an orthodox conception of human rights and plurality, which turns out to be essential implication of the Trinitarian theology. One does not trace, in a framework thus sketched, the elevation of the motherland and the nation above human rights nor the defence of or identification with a single people as is the case with the ROC,<sup>66</sup> but that ‘Christian globalization’ or ‘spiritual ecumenicity’ which, in firm opposition to that which in various forms annihilates and attacks human nature, promotes dialogue and human rights on a universal level.<sup>67</sup>

Regarding territory issue, the EP chose the line of transnationality. In the second half of the twentieth century the Patriarchate emerged as a representative transnational organization of Orthodox Greeks worldwide later coming to assume the image of a global institution<sup>68</sup> supported by the synchronous elaboration, by Orthodox theologians and academics close to the Patriarchate, of the positive theological vision of globalization, pluralism, otherness that we reported above. Deterritorialized religiosity provided an opportunity to adapt Orthodoxy to the contemporary and renew the status of the Patriarchate by transforming it into a truly supranational institution. Respecting the independence of the other territorial autocephalous churches, the patriarchal thesis wants all the remaining regions of the globe to fall under its jurisdiction because of its traditional status as *primus inter pares* and because of the canonical authority derived from the decisions of Ecumenical Councils II and IV, especially under Canon 28 of Chalcedon which attributes jurisdiction over “barbarian lands” to Constantinople,<sup>69</sup> theoretically binding on all Orthodox churches. Consequently, it is considered the only authority capable of conferring or revoking canonical status on local churches. Bartholomew further expanded the perspective of spiritual

<sup>65</sup> Payne, “Towards an Orthodox Understanding”, 620-1.

<sup>66</sup> Payne, “Towards an Orthodox Understanding”, 625.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Bartholomew, “The Role of Religion”, 432-55.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Grigoriadis, “The Ecumenical Patriarchate as a Global Actor”.

<sup>69</sup> Payne, “Spiritual Security”, 726.

ecumenicity, making it a cornerstone of his work. He first wanted to revive the convention of synods with the participation of all Orthodox patriarchs and representatives of the local autocephalous Churches, rebuilding a sense of pan-Orthodox unity and assuming the role of institutional arbiter with a strategy of strengthening its canonical status. Also, through his more than decade-long commitment to interreligious and ecumenical dialogue and dedication to the sensitive social and environmental issues, he succeeded in ensuring that the EP could relate to the Papacy from global headquarters to global headquarter. Rejecting the theory of deterritorialization, the Patriarchate's social and theological vision rather recognized in it a possibility to strengthen the prestige of the Church and to confirm the Patriarchate's position as a global agent, representative of all Orthodox Christianity without constraints of ethnicity or territoriality. "It is inconceivable for the nation to be declared a decisive factor in church life, for the Church to deliver an ethnocentric discourse, to ally itself with nationalist political movements", Bartholomew said. "The true Orthodox faith is impossible for it to be a source of nationalism. Wherever nationalism appears in an Orthodox context, it has other roots and motivations" – he said – concluding that "the Ecumenical Patriarchate, although in the maelstrom of nationalisms, has not surrendered and maintains its supranational character".<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, Roudometof observes, the patriarchal promotion of a deterritorialized religiosity allows for considerable flexibility in jurisdictional disputes that can express itself in the opportunistic and inconsistent use of its canonical authority<sup>71</sup> to selectively accept or reject attempts at national autocephaly.<sup>72</sup>

The different view on the relations the Church should have with political power represents together with the divergences on human rights (rights in accordance with the values of the motherland vs. inviolability of rights with respect to national interests) a decisive factor underlying the uneven advances in ecumenical dialogue. The disintegration of Orthodox unity is an effect arising from such underlying issues, so divisive as to undermine, in competition with additional causes that transcend the strictly religious realm, a firmly shared theological-doctrinal framework.

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<sup>70</sup> Falasca, "Intervista. Bartolomeo".

<sup>71</sup> Roudometof, "Greek Orthodoxy, Territoriality, and Globality", 79.

<sup>72</sup> Roudometof, "Greek Orthodoxy, Territoriality, and Globality", 86.

### 3 Ukraine: Ecclesiastical and Political Reflections Before and During 2018 Events

Since the complex and turbulent history of the Churches in Ukraine and the jurisdictional fragmentation of its territory is well known,<sup>73</sup> so let us proceed by focusing on very recent times. Before the events of 2018,<sup>74</sup> there were three Orthodox denominations in the Ukrainian canonical precinct. The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) counted 14 dioceses, 12 bishops and 1167 parishes. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP) had 35 dioceses, 42 bishops and 5167 parishes. Lastly, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) consisted of 52 dioceses, 73 bishops and 12,348 parishes.<sup>75</sup> It should also be considered, in addition, that the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), the country's largest non-Orthodox religious group, has 16 eparchies, 45 bishops and more than 3500 churches on Ukrainian soil. There is no sufficiently certain data regarding the number of believers in these denominations. According to the Ministry of Culture, the UOC-KP has followers primarily in the central and western oblasts, with a smaller number in Zakarpattya Oblast. The UOC-MP is present in all regions of the country, but it has a smaller presence in Ivano-Frankivsk and Lviv Oblasts in the western part of the country. Most UAOC adherents are in the western part of the country, while followers of the UGCC reside primarily in the western oblasts of Lviv, Ternopil, and Ivano-Frankivsk.<sup>76</sup>

In such a religious divide,<sup>77</sup> we see how politics took on increasing prominence: the nationalist UOC-KP and UAOC received the reciprocated support of independence leaders, whereas the

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. Merlo, *La costruzione dell'Ucraina contemporanea*; Merlo, "Una chiesa per la nazione"; Merlo, *All'ombra delle cupole d'oro*; Bociurkiw, "The Church and the Ukrainian Revolution"; Bociurkiw, "The Autocephalous Church Movement"; Bociurkiw, "The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church"; Ul'janovskij, Andrusyšin, *Cerkva v Ukrajin's'kij Deržavi 1917-1920 rr.*; Sysyn, "The Third Ribirth"; Denisenko, *The Orthodox Church in Ukraine*.

<sup>74</sup> For the pre-2018 development, cf. Krawchuk, Bremer, *Churches in the Ukrainian Crisis*; Shestopalets, "The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate"; Napolitano, "L'autocefalia della chiesa ortodossa ucraina". For the later events, cf. Coleman, "Orthodoxy and Autocephaly in Ukraine"; Bortnyk, "Church and Exclusivism in Ukrainian Orthodoxy".

<sup>75</sup> Державні документи, заяви і звернення Всеукраїнської Ради Церков і релігійних організацій, "Особливості релігійного і церковно-релігійного самовизначення українських громадян".

<sup>76</sup> U.S. Department of State, "2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: Ukraine".

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Kuzio, "In Search of Unity and Autocephaly"; Wawrzonek, *Religion and Politics in Ukraine*.

Moscow-dependent UOC-MP could count on the support of pro-Russian leaders, whom it backed in return along with the Russian Federation. This pattern can be observed in every presidential election. In 1994, for example, Kravčuk, favoured by the UOC-KP and the UAOC, lost to Kučma who, supported by the UOC-MP, dissolved the Council for Religious Affairs that advocated the creation of a state church.<sup>78</sup> By contrast, in 2004, pro-Russian candidate Janukovyč (later president from 2010 to 2014) collaborated with the UOC-MP to promote anti-religious freedom legislation that would have made other Orthodox churches in the country illegal. The victory of pro-European Juščenko prevented the implementation of the draft law and revealed to the public the overlap between the interests of the Moscow-linked church and the plans of the pro-Russian ruling class. While the religious factors were of great significance in the Ukrainian nation-building process,<sup>79</sup> they were also used to reinforce the political-spiritual bond with Russia. For decades two nationalist churches eager to be recognized by the EP managed to coexist, with mixed fortunes, with a third church that was subordinated to Moscow. In 2008, on the occasion of the 1020th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus', Aleksij II and Bartholomew visited Ukraine. Juščenko, who on that occasion aspired to the granting of autocephaly for a unified Ukrainian church, as did Metropolitan Filaret (UOC-KP), reserved for the Constantinopolitan primate a head-of-state welcome that he did not accord his Russian counterpart. Once again, Bartholomew did not take action.<sup>80</sup> The following year, the visit of the newly elected Patriarch Kirill had precise political implications. First of all, it can be noted that Kirill consciously chose Ukraine for his first patriarchal visit: "the first thing that came to my mind after my appointment to the patriarchal seat" – the patriarch stated – "was to visit the Holy Land of Kyiv, to pray to Prince Vladimir [...] for our Holy Church and for our people".<sup>81</sup> The speeches he delivered during the trip clearly revealed the role Ukraine plays for the Russian Church:

Rus' comes from here, from these hills of Kyiv along the Dnipro. Here are the foundations of our faith, the beginnings of our Church, the birth of our state sovereignty from which the independent states were later derived. Here lies our historical past.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Kuzio, "In Search of Unity and Autocephaly"; Wawrzonek, *Religion and Politics in Ukraine*.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Garzaniti, "Alle radici della formazione".

<sup>80</sup> Payne, Tonoyan, "The Visit of Patriarch Kirill", 256.

<sup>81</sup> "Vizit Svyateyshego Patriarkha Kirilla na Ukrainu" published in *Zhurnal Moskovskoi Patriarkhii* on 9 September, 16-43, quoted in Payne, Tonoyan, "The Visit of Patriarch Kirill", 257.

And I may surprise some of you by saying that, in a sense, this is where our future will also be decided to a large extent. When I say “we” or “our” I mean all of us who belong to the unique civilization of ancient Kyivan Rus, which flourished, developed and became a powerful actor in world civilization.<sup>82</sup>

The patriarch’s words well express the ROC’s approach about the Ukrainian case. Kirill’s vision contemplates a *Russkii mir* in which Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, which share the conversion to Orthodoxy of tenth century Kyivan Rus’, form a single cultural and value entity though remaining politically independent states.<sup>83</sup> His goal is to preserve the “Eastern Slavic civilization”, of which he presents himself as the spiritual leader: from this viewpoint, the Holy Rus’ church, which has its roots in Kyiv, unifies the Slavic world and is a necessary means of maintaining said unity.<sup>84</sup> The decision to visit Ukraine then becomes part of the plan to strengthen the ROC and compact its branches under the canonical jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate (MP). Therefore, in making what he called a pilgrimage to the mother of all Rus’,<sup>85</sup> the place where “Russianness”<sup>86</sup> was forged, he wanted to highlight the inseparability between the Russian Church and Ukrainian territory. Indeed, it is no coincidence that in reference to the Slavic peoples, Kyiv is called “our common Jerusalem”.<sup>87</sup> Until 2014, the year of the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in the Donbass and Crimea, the patriarch made an annual pastoral trip to Ukraine for celebrations of St. Vladimir, which led nationalists to accuse him of playing the role of “government official” and pursuing purely practical goals<sup>88</sup> in the wake of a political agenda aimed at colonizing Ukraine<sup>89</sup> as a satellite state of the Russian spiritual empire<sup>90</sup> through the MP. In 2010, the proximity of the Russian primate benefited Janukovyč, who was elected president and received Kirill’s blessing in person upon taking office. After his dismissal and the period of severe political turmoil of Euromaidan, the new president since 2014

<sup>82</sup> Kirill, “Прямой эфир с Патриархом Московским и всея Руси Кириллом. Полная версия”.

<sup>83</sup> Rousselet, “The Russian Orthodox Church and the *Russkii Mir*”.

<sup>84</sup> Payne, Tonoyan, “The Visit of Patriarch Kirill”, 260.

<sup>85</sup> Patriarch Kirill’s interview for Inter TV Channel, 30 July 2009.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Agadjanian, Pankhurst, Roudometof, *Eastern Orthodoxy in a Global Age*.

<sup>87</sup> Payne, Tonoyan, “The Visit of Patriarch Kirill”, 257.

<sup>88</sup> MCC, “Vizit Patriarkha Kirilla v Ukrainu i reaktsiya v Rossii”, 2 August, quoted in Payne, Tonoyan, “The Visit of Patriarch Kirill”, 260.

<sup>89</sup> MCC, “Vizit Patriarkha Kirilla v Ukrainu i reaktsiya v Rossii”, 2 August, quoted in Payne, Tonoyan, “The Visit of Patriarch Kirill”, 260.

<sup>90</sup> Zolotov, “The Old New Player”, 13.

Poroshenko, a pro-European and nationalist, made the formation of a single autocephalous Ukrainian Church a personal political battle.<sup>91</sup> In 2016, Ukrainian affairs came crashing down on the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church held in Crete. More than 1,200 years after the last ecumenical council recognized by the Orthodox Church (Nicaea II, 787), and after more than half a century of preparations, a pan-Orthodox council was indeed scheduled to gather again. During the weeks leading up to the opening date of June 20 and after taking part in the entire preliminary stage, the Churches of Antioch, Georgia, Bulgaria and Russia withdrew one by one. These very heavy and unexpected rejections were a consequence of a set of factors ranging from dogmatic issues to geopolitical events. However, considering that the Council was only convened by unanimous synodal decision at the Chambesy meeting in January of the same year, it seems to us that the real cause of the rupture can be traced to geopolitical turmoil. Indeed, at the very outset of the Council there was the Verchovna Rada's request to Patriarch Bartholomew to nullify the 1686 act<sup>92</sup> that had transferred the Kyiv metropolis under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate and to become the advocate of the resolution of the heated division existing within Ukrainian Orthodoxy. Confirming this, Lavrov stated that he would not allow the ROC participation since the Council represented a political attempt outside the Orthodox to bring schism, primarily using the crisis in Ukraine and anti-Russian rhetoric to damage the positions of the ROC.<sup>93</sup> Faced with the ROC's repeated negligence, the EP finally decided to intervene in 2018.<sup>94</sup> Taking up the political demands and thrusts coming from the UOC-KP and UAOC, the Phanariot Synod revoked the 1686 conciliar *tomos* and created, through the Council of Reconciliation in December 2018, a new configuration which the two non-canonical churches converged into and which was granted autocephaly: the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (UOC).<sup>95</sup> This decision had been discussed in August of that year by Bartholomew and Kirill during the last and very long confrontation between the two at the Phanar in which they failed to reach an agreement. President Poroshenko, who had signed a bilateral agreement with Bartholomew in November, was thus able

<sup>91</sup> Brylov, Kalenychenko, Kryshtal, "The Religious Factor in Conflict"; Shestopalets, "Church and State in Ukraine". Cf. Puleri, Vukoslavcevic, "Strengthening the State-Religion Nexus".

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Tchentsova, "The Patriarchal and Synodal Act of 1686".

<sup>93</sup> Двери на православието, "Външният министър на РФ коментира Всеправославния събор".

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Napolitano, "Introduction. The Historical-National Roots".

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Parlato, "L'autocefalia della Chiesa ortodossa ucraina, interpretazioni dottrinali e strutture ecclesiali".



to rejoice, seeing a key point of his program fulfilled in the run-up to the upcoming elections.<sup>96</sup> The election of Metropolitan Epifanij put an end to the jurisdictional bipartition of Ukrainian Orthodox denominations that had been going on until then. When invited to the Council, the UOC-MP declined the invitation.<sup>97</sup> The sharp reaction of the Russian Holy Synod resulted in the interruption of Eucharistic communion with the Constantinopolitan see, hence the unilateral schism that is still going on. From then on, the rift between the EP and the ROC, fuelled by continuous occasions of confrontation, would grow wider and wider. Patriarch Bartholomew hoped that the establishment of the UOC would allow Russians and Ukrainians to unite into one national multi-ethnic church. This is what he said in this regard in 2021:

If Moscow had shown a willingness to cooperate, becoming aware of the emerging historical, social and ecclesiastical conditions, the issue would have been resolved many years ago. For three decades Moscow has been blatantly blind to the tragic ecclesiastical situation in that country. It essentially prevented a solution from being found in order that Kyiv, which the Church of Russia had taken from the Church of Constantinople – profiting from historical circumstances and events – would not escape Moscow's control. The granting of an autocephalous status to the Church of Ukraine by the Ecumenical Patriarchate thus was not only ecclesiological-ly and canonically correct, but also the only realistic solution to the problem.<sup>98</sup>

On the other hand, in pursuing his well-known geopolitical design of a clash of civilizations<sup>99</sup> in which the Russian world finds itself surrounded, Kirill argued:

The Phanar did not simply make a mistake, but committed a crime. [...] Patriarch Bartholomew was under pressure from powerful political forces of one of the world superpowers. [...] The logic was to distance Russia, Orthodox Russia from its Orthodox brothers and sisters in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. [...] The intention: the rift between the Russian Church and the Greek Orthodox.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Cimbalo, "L'evoluzione dei rapporti".

<sup>97</sup> Merlo, "L'ortodossia ucraina: verso l'unità o la frantumazione?", 190.

<sup>98</sup> Falasca, "Intervista. Bartolomeo".

<sup>99</sup> Stoeckl, *The Russian Orthodox Church*, 56.

<sup>100</sup> Prezzi, "Lacerazione nell'ortodossia", 2.

In the Russian patriarch's view, Bartholomew would have submitted himself to U.S. liberalism and the Western logic of weakening Russia.<sup>101</sup> Once again, the Moscow primate overlapped the fate of the ROC and that of the Russian Federation and was backed up by Lavrov's statements that hold the Ecumenical Patriarch politically responsible, at the behest of the U.S., for "sowing discord in Ukraine by creating a purported Orthodox Church of Ukraine" and "burying the influence of Orthodoxy in today's world".<sup>102</sup> The then chairman of the MP's Department for External Church Relations Metropolitan Hilarion stated that it was quite obvious that the U.S. government was behind the EP's actions.<sup>103</sup> The U.S. government's meetings with the Ukrainian ecclesiastical hierarchy that took place in 2018, and the repeatedly expressed support for it, constitute indeed historical evidence that in the Ukrainian case political and spiritual aspects cannot be separated. Hilarion accused Bartholomew of dogmatic aberrations, denial of synodality, transgression of the bimillennial canonical tradition, substitution of the patriarch for Jesus Christ and papism.<sup>104</sup> The latter replied to these "speculations" by pointing out that contributing to the arbitration and settlement of disputes between the churches is nothing more than the precise canonical responsibility of the Constantinopolitan see.<sup>105</sup>

#### 4 Some Consequences of the 'Schism'

In addition to impacting ecumenical dialogue,<sup>106</sup> the UOC was the subject of bitter debate among the other Orthodox autocephalous Churches from the ecclesiological perspective. A general attitude of caution prevailed, apart from a few more explicit sides, which flowed into the call for the convening of a pan-Orthodox synod on the matter. To date, no synod is scheduled. Well before the escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian war with the large-scale invasion of Ukraine, the aftermath of the 'Schism' had extended the clash between the two sees on so many fronts that the wound was already considered

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<sup>101</sup> Hilarion said: "Patriarch Bartholomew is part of a big geopolitical project, a project aimed at further weakening Russia, at driving a wedge between the peoples of Russia and Ukraine. And the Russian Orthodox Church, which unites these peoples, is now probably the main obstacle to the implementation of the U.S. plans". <https://interfax.com/newsroom/top-stories/21720/>.

<sup>102</sup> Prezzi, "Lacerazione nell'ortodossia", 2.

<sup>103</sup> Hilarion, "By His Invasion in Ukraine".

<sup>104</sup> Ivanov, "A Letter of ROC Bishop". Cf. Видинский Даниил, митрополит, "За единство Церкви".

<sup>105</sup> Prezzi, "Lacerazione nell'ortodossia", 3.

<sup>106</sup> Smytsnyuk, "The New Orthodox Church in Ukraine".

irreparable.<sup>107</sup> After the disavowal of the Phanariot throne, the ROC decided to intervene in the foreign canonical territories<sup>108</sup> that it asserts for itself, claiming the full legitimacy of its actions.<sup>109</sup> This had of course already happened in disputed jurisdictions and in historically unorthodox strategic areas such as China.<sup>110</sup> In this instance, however, the dispute will encompass Orthodoxy in its entirety. In this light it could be read the fact that, in May 2022, the Serbian Orthodox Church, close to Moscow, anticipated the Phanar in reinstating and granting autocephaly to the Macedonian Orthodox Church, which until then had been non-canonical, causing the irritation of Bartholomew, who had received the request from political and ecclesiastical authorities. Since the schism with the Serbian Church lasted since 1967, it seems to us that it is not a coincidence that the granting of autocephaly came at this precise moment in history. Moreover, the fact that this happened at the hands of the Serbian Church and not from Constantinople seems to us to be attributable to the fact that only in this way could the ROC - which totally delegitimized the Phanar - have recognized this operation. In fact, the ROC promptly recognized the new Church,<sup>111</sup> which was in all evidence more inclined to an anti-Atlanticist posture that could not have declined with Constantinople.<sup>112</sup> What happened in Africa, a geographic area where the Orthodox presence is placed under the legitimate patriarchal authority of the historic see of Alexandria, is extremely more severe. The decision taken in December 2021 by the Russian Synod to establish two dioceses for Northern and Southern Africa in an Exarchate dependent on the MP therefore appeared as a reckless violation,<sup>113</sup> a

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<sup>107</sup> Cimbalo, "Il ruolo sottaciuto delle Chiese".

<sup>108</sup> A detailed reconstruction of the issue of territorial principle and the ecclesiological repercussions on the Ukrainian case can be read in Bremer, "New Approaches in Ecclesiology?" and Erickson, "Territorial Organization of the Orthodox Church".

<sup>109</sup> The primatial authority from which the role and functions of the EP derive are openly opposed by the MP. The main accusation is that of improperly using the term "ecumenical" through a flattening on the meaning of "universal", which, relating originally to Universal Sees all, is arbitrarily "exclusivited" in favour of the Patriarchate of Constantinople only. While at first the definition of "ecumenical" could be accepted, insofar as it was intended to cover exclusively the territorial extent of the Imperial borders, the ROC claims the fact that there are no texts and laws enumerated in the *Nomokanon* that speak of the See of Constantinople as the head of all the Churches or that impose its universal jurisdiction beyond Byzantium. This point of view, better explained, is published on the ROC website: <https://mospat.ru/en/authors-analytics/87448/>.

<sup>110</sup> Rozanskij, "Il Patriarcato di Mosca".

<sup>111</sup> ROC, "Russian Church Recognizes Macedonian Orthodox Church".

<sup>112</sup> The Orthodox Church of Macedonia's gratitude to Kirill and ROC's satisfaction with this reconciliation emerge from "Patriarch Kirill's telephone conversation with Archbishop Stefan of Ohrid and Macedonia", DECR, 13 January 2023.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Parlato, "Recenti controversie sulla giurisdizione".

harsh reaction to Patriarch Theodoros II's support to Bartholomew on the Ukrainian case, regarding which he had initially expressed closeness to Kirill. The recognition of the UOC triggered the wrath of Moscow, which welcomed the transfer of 102 priests from the Patriarchate of Alexandria and created a series of dioceses (Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, Chad, Cameroon, Nigeria, Libya, Central Africa, South Africa, Seychelles) in the canonical territory of another autocephalous Church.<sup>114</sup> Even more striking is the scenario loomed by the ROC of even intervening in Constantinople: "We cannot deny Orthodox believers in Turkey pastoral care" – said Hilarion – "given that the Patriarch of Constantinople has sided with the schism".<sup>115</sup> A valid bugbear for other autocephalous Churches not to support the EP over Ukraine, the plan would include a series of aids for the Phanariot clergy most hostile to Bartholomew. "The bishops of the Patriarchate of Constantinople" – the metropolitan continues, – "keep telling us that «autocephaly [of Ukraine] is a fait accompli». Therefore, if that is the case, then the division in Orthodoxy is also a fait accompli".<sup>116</sup> A dual jurisdiction in the heart of Orthodoxy, with the ROC intruding into the already very fragile canonical enclosure of the EP, would mark the point of no return in the internal relations of the Orthodox Church.

On the Ukrainian political side, Porošenko's presidency had bequeathed two controversial laws on how to transition to the autocephalous Church and on changing the name of the ROC-dependent church from "Ukrainian Orthodox Church" to "Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine", causing a legal disruption that jeopardized the UOC-MP's properties and legal recognitions.<sup>117</sup> During the 2019 presidential election, the Kyiv Administrative Court declared law enforcement processes illegal, ensuring legal cover for clergy and ecclesiastical structures.<sup>118</sup> The election as president of Zelensky, who won with a plebiscite percentage (73.23% in the second round), saw voters reward for the first time a candidate who was not exposed in the religious sphere and favoured less state interference.<sup>119</sup> The war events of 2022, however, forced Zelensky to change his approach. Without venturing into the so-called recentism, let us take a look at some aspects of the impact of the war on the Ukrainian ecclesiastical situation

<sup>114</sup> Rozanskij, "La Chiesa russa si prende l'Africa".

<sup>115</sup> Prezzi, "Scisma ortodosso: Mosca accelera".

<sup>116</sup> Prezzi, "Scisma ortodosso: Mosca accelera".

<sup>117</sup> Prezzi, "Lacerazione nell'ortodossia", 4.

<sup>118</sup> Prezzi, "Ucraina: Zelensky e le Chiese".

<sup>119</sup> Prezzi, "Ucraina: Zelensky e le Chiese".

## 5 The Churches, the Conflict and the Catholic-Orthodox Relations

Following Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, which marked the final escalation of the conflict, Patriarch Kirill's conduct has been consistent with the positions and ideology he previously expressed. After all, his proximity to Putin<sup>120</sup> and the centrality of his action in the political-spiritual project of the *Russkiy mir* left no room for other unlikely paths. It should not be forgotten that during the years of his residence in Geneva, where he represented the ROC at the World Council of Churches, Kirill worked for the KGB with the aim of mitigating criticism against restrictions on religious freedom in the Soviet Union and negatively influencing the Council with regard to the USA.<sup>121</sup> The dense relations and cooperation between the ROC hierarchy and the Russian intelligence services from the late 1960s onward, publicly well known since 1991, aimed precisely at supporting, both politically and religiously, the big geopolitical-spiritual project of Soviet Russia, which saw forced control of the ROC as the means to best deploy its designs. The regime focused its action mainly on interreligious dialogue, on the WCC and international organizations and on the attempt to influence global public opinion from a pro-Soviet perspective.<sup>122</sup> Despite the political changes since the end of the Soviet era,<sup>123</sup> this remains the geopolitical and ideological framework in which the current Patriarch Kirill was formed. It is no wonder that on 6 March 2022, in expressing himself on the conflict, the primate of Moscow portrayed a scenario of confrontation between the righteous in faith and the sinners, between the dignified observers of divine law and the perverse propagators of the Western value heresy of false freedom.<sup>124</sup> The war is described as a "test", a "test of loyalty" to which people are called in order to reject "the gay pride parade" in a determined resistance to the countries of perdition. It is such resistance, such "fundamental rejection of the so-called values that are being offered today by those

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<sup>120</sup> Cf. Rubboli, *La guerra santa di Putin e Kirill*; Codevilla, *La nuova Russia (1990-2015)*; Codevilla, *Stato e Chiesa nella Federazione Russa*; Gabashvili, *Prima e dopo la fine*; Garrard, Garrard, "Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent"; Knox, *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church*; Papkova, *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*; Wallace, *The Orthodox Church and Civil Society*.

<sup>121</sup> Besson, Odehnal, "Putins Patriarch war Spion". Kirill's predecessor, Patriarch Alexy II, was also a KGB agent.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Roccucci, "La Chiesa ortodossa russa e la Conferenza delle Chiese"; Codevilla, *Lo zar e il patriarca*; Bremer, *La Croce e il Cremlino*; Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia*; Kotzer, *Russian Orthodoxy, Nationalism*.

<sup>123</sup> Cf. Richters, *The Post-Soviet Russian Orthodox Church*.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Stoeckl, "The Human Rights Debate", 212-32.

who claim world power” that has brought martyrdom to the “suffering land of the Donbass”, suffocated for eight years “by human sin and hatred”. In this sense, the struggle acquires “not only physical, but metaphysical significance”.<sup>125</sup> An anthropological study by Kormina and Shtyrkov focused on the Russian Orthodox clergy’s search for a moral justification for war. Here the theme of a *bezdukhovny* (spiritually poor) West emerges repeatedly,<sup>126</sup> along with the belief that the West aims to destroy Orthodoxy as the foundation of Russia’s political and spiritual power.<sup>127</sup> Hence, even in Metropolitan Pitirim’s sermons, the nature of war as a struggle between Good and Evil, between the corrupt West, expression of the devil and Sodom, and Holy Russia, whose soldiers are nothing but martyrs.<sup>128</sup> The study then shows how over time the eschatological dimension gives way to a pastoral and missionary reading of war, devoid of any political interpretation. The conflict thus becomes an opportunity for moral transformation, divine warning, and the sacrifice of new saints: this would allow the clergy to justify the atrocities of war to themselves, not focusing on the role of the state but only on supporting men in battle.<sup>129</sup> The inextricable link between Orthodoxy, homeland and people was made manifest several times by the patriarch throughout the conflict.<sup>130</sup> On 10 April, Kirill called on the people to unite around the authorities for the sake of the motherland and repel external enemies. On 8 May 2022, at the Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces, Kirill expressed his support for all those defending the homeland, asking to pray that the army would have the necessary spiritual strength during special military operations.<sup>131</sup> On Christmas Day, 7 January 2023, he exhorted to love the homeland and defend it with sacrifice: “I would like to wish all of us to love our homeland, our people. This is the kind of love that often requires sacrifice, as is the case today on the battlefield. [...] Always be ready to love the Motherland, to serve it [...] and to defend it”.<sup>132</sup> On 19 January 2023, he went on to call on parishes to support the military materially and spiritually in the face of the attempt by united Europe and the entire Western world to conquer Russia, arguing that “both

<sup>125</sup> Kirill, *Patriarch’s Homily*, 6 March 22.

<sup>126</sup> Kormina, Shtyrkov, “State of Uncertainty”.

<sup>127</sup> Kormina, Shtyrkov, “State of Uncertainty”.

<sup>128</sup> Kormina, Shtyrkov, “State of Uncertainty”.

<sup>129</sup> Kormina, Shtyrkov, “State of Uncertainty”.

<sup>130</sup> A very thorough study about Kirill’s war justification rhetoric and his loyalty to Putin is covered in Rousselet, *La Sainte Russie contre l’Occident*.

<sup>131</sup> Napolitano, “Il patriarca Kirill e la guerra”.

<sup>132</sup> БИЗНЕС, “Патриарх Кирилл пожелал детям любить Родину и быть готовыми ее защитить”.

the Church and all those who influence and can influence our society must do everything for Russia to win”, as it stands as the last stronghold of “traditional values such as family, sense of duty and patriotism”: “we stand for the Motherland, we stand for our people”.<sup>133</sup> In a homily delivered on 3 May 2022 at the Kremlin’s Cathedral of the Archangel, the Russian primate went so far as to deny the invasion: “Russia has never attacked anyone. It is surprising that a large and powerful country has never attacked anyone, but has only defended its borders”.<sup>134</sup> Such statements generated quite a few issues within Orthodoxy and ecumenical dialogue. On the Sunday of Orthodoxy 2022, a group of 293 ROC presbyters published a call “to all those on whom the cessation of the fratricidal war in Ukraine depends” for “reconciliation and an immediate cease-fire”, making a decisive stand against the war.<sup>135</sup> Another section of the Russian clergy – still a minority – is hesitant to speak out, given the near impossibility of publicly condemning the conflict without facing severe consequences from the Church hierarchy, or because of a varied array of pastoral, material, personal, and social motivations, and seeks alternative, non-explicit strategies of intervening.<sup>136</sup> On 13 March of the same year, more than 1,500 Orthodox intellectuals and theologians signed the document “A Declaration on the “Russian World” (Russkii mir) Teaching” published by Fordham University with which, “in the wake of the unacceptable and horribly destructive invasion of Ukraine”, they condemn as heresy the concept of *Russkiy mir* used by the Patriarch of Moscow to justify the war and “the connivance of the Russian Orthodox Church” and Patriarch Kirill, who “invaded the Orthodox Church” with “a vile and indefensible teaching [...] profoundly un-Orthodox, un-Christian and against humanity”.<sup>137</sup> Within the ROC, the voices of Metropolitan Onufrij, primate of the UOC-MP, and of Metropolitan John of Dubna, head of the archdiocese in Western Europe linked to the Moscow See, also rose against Kirill. The fact that the Russian Metropolitan of Kyiv himself firmly opposed Kirill by referring to “fratricidal blood” and the “sin of Cain”<sup>138</sup> is indicative of how a decisive battle for Orthodoxy is being played out on

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<sup>133</sup> Kirill, Святейший Патриарх Кирилл”.

<sup>134</sup> Kirill, *Patriarch’s Homily*, 6 March 22.

<sup>135</sup> “Beati gli operatori di pace. Appello di presbiteri della chiesa ortodossa russa alla riconciliazione e alla fine della guerra”: <https://www.monasterodibose.it/comunita/finestra-ecumenica/14998-beati-gli-operatori-di-pace>.

<sup>136</sup> Rousselet, “Quelles résistances?”.

<sup>137</sup> “A Declaration on the ‘Russian World’ (Russkii mir) Teaching”. <https://www.academia.org/en/news-announcements/press/963-a-declaration-on-the-russian-world-russkii-mir-teaching>.

<sup>138</sup> Scaramuzzi, “Ucraina, le bombe russe”.

the Ukrainian ground. Indeed, while on the one hand it would be unthinkable for Moscow to deprive itself of its jurisdiction in Ukraine (since losing it would imply a significant impoverishment in terms of size and prestige), on the other hand the UOC-MP is faced with the anger of the Ukrainian believers and clergy who see themselves attacked by the ecclesiastical institution to which they belong.<sup>139</sup> Foreseeing a risk of a vast migration of dioceses to the UOC, on 27 May 2022, the UOC-MP decided to make changes to its Statutes such as to establish “full independence and autonomy”<sup>140</sup> from the MP, condemning the conflict and communicating through official channels its disagreement with Patriarch Kirill’s and the ROC’s stance on the war.<sup>141</sup> The status change was approved by the Council with 95% of the votes in favour, but an open wound still exists. Should this not be a bluff to keep communities and parishes in agreement with Moscow, the future of the Russian Patriarchate, which would see its control over Slavic Jerusalem crumble, appears to depend on the outcome of the war. However, separation from Moscow did not imply a merger with Constantinople for the former UOC-MP.<sup>142</sup> In fact, not all the dioceses that disavowed Kirill switched to the UOC: indeed, a petition of 430 priests from the UOC-MP called for declaring an autocephaly and removing the patriarch.<sup>143</sup> They now make up a kind of autocephaly in the making, concerned about getting through the war unscathed.<sup>144</sup> In other words, the fragmentation persists. On the other

<sup>139</sup> On the religious sentiment of Ukrainian Orthodox refer to the anthropological study by Wanner, *Everyday Religiosity*.

<sup>140</sup> The choice of terms used by Metropolitan Onufrij is significant. He walks a fine line, aware of the canonical weight that terms such as “autocephaly” would have. The operation of the UOC-MP in an autonomist key was conducted in a very rapid and unspoken manner. The stages of the separation process and the convening of the Council are dealt with in detail in OrthodoxTimes 2022, “The Orthodox Church in Ukraine: War and another Autocephaly”: <https://orthodoxtimes.com/the-orthodox-church-in-ukraine-war-and-another-autocephaly/>.

<sup>141</sup> Собор Української Православної Церкви, “Постанова Собору Української Православної Церкви від 27 травня 2022 року”.

<sup>142</sup> This can be seen from the Resolutions of the Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of 27 May 2022. It is clear that the UOC-MP does not recognize the UOC and the apostolic succession of its members just as it attacks the decisions of Bartholomew and the Ukrainian political authorities: “The Council perceives the existence of the schism as a deep painful wound on the Church body. [...] The formation of the ‘Orthodox Church of Ukraine’, only deepened misunderstandings and led to physical confrontation. [...] The OCU representatives need to: stop the illegal seizure of churches and forced transfers of parishes of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), realise that their canonical status [...] is significantly inferior to the freedoms and opportunities for the implementation of Church activities as compared to those that are provided for in the Statute of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. [...] To recognise the canonicity of the hierarchy of the OCU, it is first necessary to restore the apostolic succession of its bishops”.

<sup>143</sup> Rozanskij, “Kirill invita a difendere Mosca”.

<sup>144</sup> Kalenychenko, Brylov, “Ukrainian Religious Actors”.



hand, a large number of parishes, which are granted the freedom to deliberate by majority vote on the possibility of moving from one jurisdiction to another, joined the autocephalous Church blessed by Bartholomew. Figures reported in early 2023 by Kyiv Metropolitan Epifanij show that approximately 1,500 religious communities chose to move from the UOC-MP to the new UOC since the 2018 council, including as many as 700 since February 2022.<sup>145</sup> An investigation by journalist Horyevoy, furthermore, speaks of about 1100 relocated communities until December 2022, of which more than 600 after the war escalated.<sup>146</sup> Meanwhile, on the Ukrainian political side, between December 2022 and January 2023 President Zelensky signed a series of decrees aimed at ensuring Ukraine's "spiritual independence". The Ukrainian intelligence service's discovery of a series of links between invaders and Moscow-linked clergy, accused of espionage and collaborationism, triggered a regulatory process that should lead to the banning of any church entity affiliated with Russian centres of influence.<sup>147</sup> Among the most painful losses for the MP are the two churches of the Assumption and Refectory of the Upper Lavra<sup>148</sup> in Kyiv, in which they are no longer allowed to officiate pending their legal assignment to the UOC.<sup>149</sup> This is another point where the Ukrainian political and religious spheres have become tied hand in glove: the pressure of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) and government on the UOC-MP has been increasing more and more, producing a long series of operations and decrees<sup>150</sup> and inducing violent eviction from UOC-MP churches several times. The instrumentalization of religious question by politics was also the subject of an investigation by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, which identified in the Rada's recent legislation the danger of discriminatorily restricting UOC-MP religious freedom.<sup>151</sup> The intelligence focus on the UOC-MP has been justified by the fact that the UOC-MP was unable to effectively break away from Moscow and the collaborationists, eventually opting for a wait-and-see policy poorly tolerated by the Rada.<sup>152</sup> Thus, on both the Russian and Ukrainian sides,

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<sup>145</sup> Кошкіна, "Митрополит Епіфаній".

<sup>146</sup> Geslin, "Reportage. La guerre des clochers".

<sup>147</sup> Brylov, Kalenychenko, Mandaville, *Assessing Kyiv's New Focus*.

<sup>148</sup> The move of these two crucial churches, it should be emphasized, was not due to their community's request to join the UOC, but to a political decision by the Ukrainian government for internal security reasons, which was met with protests from the monks residing there in response.

<sup>149</sup> Brylov, Kalenychenko, "Inter-Orthodox crisis in Ukraine".

<sup>150</sup> Brylov, Kalenychenko, "Inter-Orthodox crisis in Ukraine".

<sup>151</sup> Brylov, Kalenychenko, "Inter-Orthodox crisis in Ukraine".

<sup>152</sup> Brylov, Kalenychenko, "Inter-Orthodox crisis in Ukraine".

religion is being used, Wanner points out, as a proxy war and as a political resource within the armed conflict.<sup>153</sup> Back to Kirill, a harsh attack toward him also came from his former close collaborator Hovorun,<sup>154</sup> who accuses him of being the main instigator of the conflict. Putin's ideology, which he defines "the patriarch's gift", is nothing – he argues – but "political orthodoxy" with which he has designed a clash of "a divine Russia against a satanic Ukraine", an invaded Jerusalem to be liberated in a crusade. Therefore, Putinism "must be deconstructed theologically".<sup>155</sup> This is what has been happening on the home front. In addition to that, blameful words also came from Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew:

In the face of the death of innocent people, the bombing of unarmed civilians, the razing of whole cities, in the face of this human tragedy, you cannot have sermons declaring a war 'holy.' This is something very sad. It causes us the deepest sadness and pain. But it causes more pain to the Ukrainians themselves. Because you cannot declare yourself a brother to a people and bless the war your state is waging against them. You cannot stubbornly insist that the Ukrainian church belongs to you and let the faithful...be killed and their churches destroyed by Russian bombardments. Unless they hope the military invasion will settle their ecclesiastical claims.<sup>156</sup>

Bartholomew's accusations are not lightweight. In his Easter homily of 2022, he insisted on the Church's obligation to act effectively as an agent of peace.<sup>157</sup> There is no shortage of occasions when the Constantinopolitan primate strongly condemned the war. On his part, head of the UOC Epifanij called for Kirill's removal as patriarch on charges of heresy, appealing to the other hierarchs of the autocephalous Churches. However, having a condemning council is not an option not only because of the opposition of patriarchs close to Kirill but also because of the possible implications and the canonical difficulty of enforcing such a far-reaching decision. As Brylov and Kalenychenko point out, Epifanij's rhetoric has evolved over time. He currently argues, along with Bartholomew, that the only viable

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<sup>153</sup> Wanner, *Everyday Religiosity*.

<sup>154</sup> A reading of his writings on the current conflict is very useful: Hovorun, "Can 'Ecumenism as Usual' be Possible"; Hovorun, "Russian Church and Ukrainian War"; Hovorun, "Religione civile e ortodossia politica".

<sup>155</sup> Varadarajan, "The Patriarch Behind Vladimir Putin".

<sup>156</sup> Kathimerini of Cyprus, "Vartholomaïos: Ukraine's suffering".

<sup>157</sup> Βαρθολομαῖος, "Πατριαρχική Απόδειξις ἐπὶ τῷ Ἀγίῳ Πάσχα 2022".

path is the existence of a single Orthodox Church in Ukraine.<sup>158</sup> the UOC.<sup>159</sup> In this, he is fully supported by domestic politics. An alternative route for Kirill's dismissal would be a highly unlikely deliberation by the Russian Holy Synod itself. In January 2023, Metropolitan Epiphany's meetings with Francis<sup>160</sup> first and Bartholomew later revealed some cracks even outside the ROC front. To understand their genesis, it is now necessary to step outside the borders of Orthodoxy and briefly trace the sequence of Francis' statements on the Russian-Ukrainian war.

In December 2022, the pontiff published a collection of his 129 speeches against the Russian invasion delivered in the period 13 February-13 November 2022, under the title *An Encyclical on Peace in Ukraine*. The high number of said speeches, which has increased to date, served as a testimony to his day-to-day commitment to the search for peace. Nevertheless, the attitude of the bishop of Rome, at least in the first months of the conflict, was branded as ambivalent with the main imputation being that he did not adequately take sides in condemning Russia. As a matter of fact, while offering humanitarian assistance and expressing closeness to the Ukrainian people – there have been countless appeals for peace for Ukraine since 2014 – the pontiff long avoided identifying the aggressor. Far from being the result of causality, Francis' communication strategy responds to a precise desire to differentiate the reactions of the Catholic Church from the inevitably harsher reactions of the Orthodox Churches involved with the aim of keeping open a channel of dialogue with Moscow and bringing diplomatic pressure by direct means. From the very beginning, the pope declared that the Holy See was "prepared to do everything" to "put itself at the service" of peace.<sup>161</sup> His goal is to foster mediation and peace negotiations to stop the bloodshed through the work of Vatican diplomacy.<sup>162</sup> We must assume, however, that Francis is responding with this strategy to the tradition of impartiality (or active impartiality) that the Holy See has repeatedly manifested throughout history in the face of major war conflicts.<sup>163</sup> In view of the long-awaited meeting with Kirill,

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<sup>158</sup> Православна Церква України, "Слово Священноархієпископа Київсько-Печерської Лаври з нагоди першого богослужіння в Успенському соборі".

<sup>159</sup> Brylov, Kalenychenko, "Inter-Orthodox crisis in Ukraine".

<sup>160</sup> The meeting took place within the hearing of the delegation of the Pan-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations. Cf. <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2023/01/25/230125a.html>.

<sup>161</sup> Francis, Angelus, 6 March 2022.

<sup>162</sup> Francis, Angelus, 13 March 2022.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. Stehlin, "The Emergence of a New Vatican Diplomacy"; Graham, *Vatican Diplomacy: A Study*; Riccardi, *La guerra del silenzio*; Ticchi, "Foundations and forms of the impartiality"; Coppa, "Pope Pius XII"; Kent, Pollard, *Papal Diplomacy*.

later cancelled, scheduled for June 2022, on 16 March Pope Francis had an online conversation with the Patriarch of Moscow to talk about “the war in Ukraine and the role of Christians and their pastors in doing everything to ensure that peace prevails”.<sup>164</sup> The two agreed that churches should “not use the language of politics, but the language of Jesus” and also agreed on the “exceptional importance of the negotiation process”.<sup>165</sup> In addition to that, when expressing himself on the victims of the conflict, the pope placed the deaths of Russians side by side with those of Ukrainians on several occasions. Criticism from the Ukrainian Embassy to the Holy See also followed the decision to have a Ukrainian woman and a Russian woman share the cross together in the 2022 Way of the Cross as a sign of reconciliation. “A pope never appoints a head of state, much less a country, which is superior to its head of state”, Francis said in an interview with *La Nación* on 22 April 2022, announcing the postponement of the meeting with Kirill (“it could lead to a lot of confusion”) and reiterating that he was “willing to do anything to stop the war”.<sup>166</sup> After having immediately condemned the conflict and branded it as “sacrilegious”, “an outrage against God, a blasphemous betrayal of the Lord”,<sup>167</sup> the tone and content of the pontiff’s statements changed in May 2022. On 3 May Francis revealed that he had asked for a meeting with the Russian president at the Kremlin, which was denied, to ask him to stop Russia’s destructive advance, which was however made easier by NATO’s mistakes. Most importantly, for the first time he spoke harshly about Kirill:

I talked with him 40 minutes. He spent the first 20 with a piece of paper in his hand reading me all the justifications for the war. I listened to him and said, “I don’t understand anything about this. Brother, we are not state clerics, we cannot use the language of politics, but the language of Jesus. We are pastors of the same holy people of God. That is why we must seek ways of peace, make the fire of weapons cease”. The Patriarch cannot turn into Putin’s altar boy.<sup>168</sup>

His statements were promptly labelled in an official note from the MP’s Department of External Ecclesiastical Relations as “regrettable”, “wrong-toned” and guilty of leading away from the establishment of a constructive dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church

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<sup>164</sup> Vatican News, “Videochiamata del Papa con Kirill”.

<sup>165</sup> Vatican News, “Videochiamata del Papa con Kirill”.

<sup>166</sup> Morales Solá, “¿De qué serviría que fuera a Kiev?”.

<sup>167</sup> Francis, General Audience, 13 April 2022.

<sup>168</sup> Fontana, “Intervista a Papa Francesco”.

and the Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>169</sup> In November 2022, the pontiff wished to clarify:

When I speak about Ukraine, I speak of a people who are martyred. If you have a martyred people, you have someone who martyrs them. [...] The one who invades is the Russian state. This is very clear. Sometimes I try not to specify so as not to offend and rather condemn in general, although it is well known whom I am condemning. It is not necessary that I put a name and surname.<sup>170</sup>

At the same time, Francis made a distinction by claiming that the cruelest militaries are those who, although Russian, do not belong to the Russian tradition such as Chechens,<sup>171</sup> Buryats and so forth.<sup>172</sup> Such a distinction was unwelcome and caused great irritation among the Russian diplomatic body. In December 2022, the Holy See was still pinning hopes on a mediation by the Vatican, as stated by Secretary of State Parolin: "We are available, I think the Vatican provides the right ground. We have tried to offer opportunities to meet with everyone and to *maintain a balance* [italics added]. We offer a space where the parties can meet and start a dialogue".<sup>173</sup> This offer was rejected precisely because of Pope Francis' statements, which were not followed by apologies.<sup>174</sup> It is also worth mentioning the unprecedented historical moment on 8 December 2022, when the pope, while publicly advocating peace for Ukraine, was forced to pause because of visible tears of emotion. On 24-25 January, going back to mentioning Epifanij's visits, the metropolitan met first with the pontiff and then with the president of Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, cardinal Koch. Thanking for spiritual and material support and mediation efforts, Epifanij announced his willingness to "join the broad Orthodox-Catholic ecumenical dialogue" by engaging "directly with the Apostolic See".<sup>175</sup> An equally warm visit to the Phanar took place on 26-27 January, when Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew renewed the closeness of the Mother Church toward the UOC. Above all, as far as our interests are concerned, he declared:

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<sup>169</sup> ROC, "Commentary by the Communications Service".

<sup>170</sup> America News, "Exclusive: Pope Francis".

<sup>171</sup> Cf. Kovalskaya, Tsormaieva, Yangulbaev, "Les Tchétchènes et la guerre".

<sup>172</sup> Kovalskaya, Tsormaieva, Yangulbaev, "Les Tchétchènes et la guerre".

<sup>173</sup> Agensir, "Guerra in Ucraina: card. Parolin".

<sup>174</sup> Tass, "Still No Apologies From Vatican".

<sup>175</sup> Православна Церква України, "У складі делегації ВРЦіРО Митрополит Епіфаній зустрівся з Папою Франциском".

We are glad that you had the opportunity to inform His Holiness Pope Francis first-hand about what is happening in Ukraine. We hope that after the briefing you had at the Vatican [...] Pope Francis will take a clearer stance on the war in Ukraine. And that, by putting aside political and diplomatic balances, he will stand closer to you and influence in favour of Ukraine many Catholic countries, toward which his words are directed.<sup>176</sup>

It seems clear that Patriarch Bartholomew did not particularly like the posture held by Pope Francis following the escalation of the conflict. This emerges again when he points out that, on the contrary, “the Ecumenical Patriarchate and we personally have very naturally condemned the unjust, unjustifiable and evil war that the Russian Federation has initiated against Ukraine from the very beginning”.<sup>177</sup> The Russian-Ukrainian war, therefore, also brought a little tension to the very firm Rome-Constantinople axis.

## 6 Final Remarks

The future of the Orthodox denominations in Ukraine surely depends on the outcome of the war, which does not seem likely to conclude anytime soon. In the event of a Russian victory, we have seen that, the Moscow Patriarchate is expected to emerge weakened anyway. The former UOC-MP will have to find a way out so as not to be incorporated by the ROC (some dioceses have already been incorporated) and maintain a hard-line stance on the conflict, though not falling under Phanariot jurisdiction. Faced with further self-proclaimed autocephaly, it is not excluded that Kirill may decide to force his hand and grant it himself, anticipating any independence yearnings. As far as the UOC is concerned, the movement of formerly Moscow-linked communities toward it will continue in the event of a Ukrainian victory. However, the UOC will have to deal with the dioceses in the occupied territories, which it is unlikely to be able to maintain and with the millions of faithful in the diaspora, being unable to create new jurisdictions outside the country. As Hovorun argues, the perception of the UOC among churches that did not support its autocephaly has now completely deteriorated.<sup>178</sup> Moreover, with Brylov and Kalenychenko, it will have to reckon in the future from the dependence and

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<sup>176</sup> Βαρθολομαίος, “Ο Προκαθήμενος της Εκκλησίας της Ουκρανίας στο Οικουμενικό Πατριαρχείο”.

<sup>177</sup> Βαρθολομαίος, “Ο Προκαθήμενος της Εκκλησίας της Ουκρανίας στο Οικουμενικό Πατριαρχείο”.

<sup>178</sup> Hovorun, “Everyone Is Still Losing”.

gratitude owed to the state of Ukraine that so strenuously defended it.<sup>179</sup> The society, briefly, results more polarized, and the division between UOC and UOC-MP further threatens national unity in the midst of a war and of course in the future perspective.<sup>180</sup> Amidst all this, ecumenical dialogue is at a standstill. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict brought the internal rift within Orthodox Christianity to a point of no return: the “schism” that has been going on since 2018 has involved more and more local Churches, and as long as the war adversely continues, a rapprochement between the parties can be ruled out. While avoiding interfering in the Orthodox agon, the Catholic Church is striving to keep the ecumenical framework in place. After a period of glimmers of hope between the Roman Catholic Church and the ROC, a new impasse stalled everything. The pontificate of Benedict XVI had in fact reinforced relations between the sees, as confirmed by Patriarch Kirill and President Putin, who recognized in Ratzinger “a staunch supporter of traditional Christian values”.<sup>181</sup> Afterward, Francis and Kirill had achieved further accomplishments in the 2016 Joint Declaration of Cuba:

We are pained by the loss of unity. [...] Mindful of the persistence of many obstacles, it is our hope that our meeting may contribute to the re-establishment of this unity willed by God, for which Christ prayed. May our meeting inspire Christians throughout the world to pray to the Lord with renewed fervour for the full unity of all His disciples. [...] In our determination to undertake all that is necessary to overcome the historical divergences we have inherited, we wish to combine our efforts to give witness to the Gospel of Christ.<sup>182</sup>

Among other things, the statements on Ukraine, then shaken by the clashes in the Donbass, appear prophetic and betrayed:

We deplore the hostility in Ukraine that has already caused many victims, inflicted innumerable wounds on peaceful inhabitants and thrown society into a deep economic and humanitarian crisis. We invite all the parts involved in the conflict to prudence, to social solidarity and to action aimed at constructing peace. We invite our Churches in Ukraine to work towards social harmony, to refrain from taking part in the confrontation, and to not support any further development of the conflict.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Brylov, Kalenychenko, “Inter-Orthodox crisis in Ukraine”.

<sup>180</sup> Brylov, Kalenychenko, Mandaville, *Assessing Kyiv's New Focus*.

<sup>181</sup> DECR, “Condolences”; Tass, “Benedict XVI was staunch defender”.

<sup>182</sup> Francis, Kirill, “Joint Declaration”, 12 February 2016.

<sup>183</sup> Francis, Kirill, “Joint Declaration”, 12 February 2016.

Faraway times. The ROC has now barred participation in the International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church as long as the EP is involved. On the part of the Holy See, which is committed to a diplomatic balancing act, however, the search for a direct channel of communication with the Moscow See does not seem to cease. One new attempt was made on 13 May 2023, the day of a private audience at the Vatican between Pope Francis and President Zelensky. Faced with the pontiff's offer to act as an intermediary, Zelensky reiterated that he did not "need mediators between Ukraine and the aggressor who occupied our territories" but a "plan of action for a just peace in Ukraine",<sup>184</sup> urging to "condemn Russian crimes [...] because victim and aggressor cannot be put on the same level" and to adopt the Ukrainian peace formula "as the only effective algorithm for achieving a just peace".<sup>185</sup> The Kremlin reacted positively to the latest attempt at appeasement, stressing, however, that "any effort in this direction will make sense only if Russia's well-known principled stance on possible peace negotiations is taken into account".<sup>186</sup> Net of any tension, the Bishop of Rome launched in June 2023 a mission entrusted to cardinal Zuppi to foster paths of peace. Francis' address in August 2023 at the 10th National Meeting of Young Catholics of Russia, in which he dwelt on the positive legacy of Great Mother Russia<sup>187</sup> – asking young Russians to be inspired by it – caused yet another media and political earthquake. While positive reactions came from the Kremlin<sup>188</sup> via the Spokesman Peskov, Kyiv and Ukrainian Christian groups accused the pontiff of engaging in imperialist propaganda and spreading pro-Russian positions, sharply shutting down his role as a mediator through Zelensky's adviser Podolyak's reaction statements.<sup>189</sup> The pope's pacifist equidistance and the now too many diplomatic incidents that have resulted from it, albeit harsh condemnation of the conflict, seem to have carved out for him the role of the main global actor in the struggle for peace while resetting to zero, on the other hand, apparently permanently in the current state of affairs, his concrete politic power to mediate between the sides.

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<sup>184</sup> Statement by Ukrainian President Zelensky on Italian TV show *Porta a Porta*, RAI, 13/05/2023.

<sup>185</sup> Zelensky's Twitter profile: <https://twitter.com/ZelenskyyUa/status/1657415728427941893?s=20>.

<sup>186</sup> RIA, "Foreign Ministry Assesses Vatican Attempts to Help End Conflict in Ukraine".

<sup>187</sup> The passage from pope Francis' speech delivered in his own words to Russian Catholic youth gathered in St. Petersburg, witnessed and recorded on camera, does not appear on the Vatican's official website.

<sup>188</sup> Tass, "Kremlin Welcomes Pope's Words".

<sup>189</sup> 24 Канал, "Критическая инфраструктура и производства России будут уничтожены: интервью с Михаилом Подоляком".



On its part, the Phanar, which bet on Ukrainian autocephaly, can only remain on a position of sharply harsher condemnation. Whether this divergence will also cool the relationship between Francis and Bartholomew remains to be seen. Despite some resentment, an inevitable expression of the role that one or the other play with regard to the war in Ukraine, contacts between the two Churches continue to be flourishing and both sides are moving forward with determination on the path of mutual rapprochement. Regarding the Russo-Ukrainian war, a replay of the primordial biblical fratricide of Cain and Abel, the concerns expressed by Pope Benedict XV on the occasion of a heartfelt call for peace during World War I gain renewed value:

There is no limit to the measure of ruin and of slaughter; day by day the earth is drenched with newly-shed blood, and is covered with the bodies of the wounded and of the slain. Who would imagine as we see them thus filled with hatred of one another, that they are all of one common stock, all of the same nature, all members of the same human society? Who would recognize brothers, whose Father is in Heaven?<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Benedict XV, *Ad Beatissimi Apostolorum*.

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